

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH, CAKE, COMPANION CUBE, AND THE POTATO IN THE PORTAL SERIES

---

**By Lisa Yamasaki**

Trying to counter the idea that video games have narrative, Jesper Juul (2003) emphasizes the significance of a challenging outcome, since any successful completion of a game depends highly on a player's effort and attachment to the outcome. Although Henry Jenkins (2002) agrees with Juul in that not all video games have narrative goals, he asserts that games make use of narrative aspirations in the space of the game. Without stating that games must have narrative functions, Jenkins interconnects the ludic in game design and narrative features by looking at the use of artifacts and space navigation. While Marie-Laure Ryan admits that few players retell their steps in the game, she also mentions that players assert authorship when they discuss their avatar's decisions. Ryan's models assert the relevance of narrative in games to present the reader with questions on the game developers' reasons for providing realistic graphics and witty stories to accompany the game rules (Ryan, 2002). Combining the narrative and algorithmic aspects in games, Ian Bogost (2006) professes that a game's unit operation, or action formed by a user's interaction with a game's formal mathematical based coding, also comprises of the game's cultural context, or story elements, and the player's subjective experience of that game. A game's procedural rhetoric, or the persuasive

component in a game, uses representations of visual media to depict a cultural expression. While a player interacts with the game's representations within a literal context, a player's subjective experience with a game allows for him/her to use the game as a metaphor for larger cultural meanings or to regard thematic elements in a game (Bogost, 2007).

Although many games allow for a combination of the constructions of narrative through engagement with simulated reality, I argue that the *Portal* series (Valve Software) conveys the theme of sublimated death as a paradoxical symbol of rebirth and transformation through the use of other symbolic objects, ones that Kinder (2002) refers as hot spots in narratives that seem "incongruous" yet cohesively piece together the story. Such objects have the power to transgress their meanings in typical contexts in order to unite different parts of the story, which gives them a more compelling meaning (Kinder, 2002). While one narrative goal in the game is to expose players to the idea of a perfectly neat science center gone wrong, some players may reexamine objects in the game to try to find missing clues to what had gone wrong in the lab. Since the puzzles allow for players to learn to solve puzzles, perhaps one unintended result is that players also look at objects to try to fill in the narrative. In context to the *Portal* games, the potato, the companion cube, and the cake function as hot spots that help communicate the theme of sublimated death. While the games have unit operations on puzzle solving, which repeatedly build on one another, my interactions with the games also demonstrated an evasion of death *and* a repetition of death to perfect puzzle solving. While my position is not to argue that one *should* look at video games with narratologist approach, I further the discussion that death transforms meaning in the games, particularly through the use of the cake and potato.

## **Repetition of Death: Narrative Trope, Ruse for Ludic Self-Mastery**

As in many video games, death gives players chances to restart the gameplay and to perfect one's skills especially after learning how one failed in the previous gameplay. In Gonzalo Frasca's essay, *Simulation vs. Narrative: An Introduction to Ludology*, he mentions that the video game medium requires that players repeat levels and chapters in order to successfully navigate the game mechanics, which impacts the unfolding of the narrative in some games. Different from the fixed structure of traditional stories, repetition becomes a crucial part of the gameplaying experience, which imparts fluidity to the way that players interpret their rendering of the story (Frasca, 2003). Suggestive of the significance of games in the psychoanalytic sense, gameplay in video games often entails the repetition of experiencing negative feelings, disappointment, frustration, and anger in order to master the skills required to master a certain challenge.

While Sherry Turkle (1995) indicates that players use games to practice enduring hardships, overcoming negative feelings, or engage in cathartic feelings, Jacques Lacan (1973) initially questions the function of the game or ludic in providing self-mastery and indicates that the game further eludes the subject from self-mastery (Lacan, 1973). In psychoanalytical contexts, a game consists of signifiers that lead to another signification chain, thus widening the gap between the subject and the repressed issue. Rather, the real or the actual issue of repression arises in the realization that something is amiss through a noise or a gesture or a lack of something in the original memory (Lacan, 1986). If self-mastery of a repressive memory is part of the curing process, it makes sense that repetition has a paradoxical nature. While this idea of the ludic initially appears to be synonymous with Callois' notion of *paidia*, Frasca's distinction of ludic as having a winner as its outcome affirms

the outcome in psychoanalytic games even if the outcome is paradoxical and entails a meandering path prior to the outcome (Frasca, 2003). In terms of Chell, the avatar, her repeated attempts allude to the ominous nature of the test-taking techniques, one that is alluded to in GLaDOS' address to her as a test-taker out of many test-takers who died in the process of resolving the puzzle. For the player, however, self-mastery becomes a guise during the later puzzles in *Portal: Still Alive*, since the logic of skill acquisition from previous puzzles fails to offer the player quick solutions for solving difficult puzzles, as in the case of Chamber 18.

In this chamber, the player has to take the falling momentum learned in previous Chambers 10 and 12 to defy gravity and shoot portals in midair. Since Chamber 18 contains a multi-roomed chamber, the gameplay incorporates more opportunities to fail. Initially, the player has to portal into other parts of a large room, which entails free-falling and running into walls to hopefully land successfully through a portal. It is hard enough to get to the super megawatt button—the device that signals puzzle completion once the player puts a weighted object on it—but one realizes that she has to enter into another chamber to retrieve the storage cube, or the necessary cube to solve the puzzle, to place it on the button. When one gets to the room, turrets, or little guard robots, await the player, ready to shoot from different locations of another room. By creating portals to direct the fire pellets to kill the turrets, one has to use the timed sequence to activate a pellet to hit a receptacle in order to activate a gate. To add to the frustration, the process of defeating the turrets in Chamber 18 contrasts differently from the skills acquired in killing them in Chamber 16—the room dedicated to mastering skills to sneak up behind the turrets and dropping storage cubes on them. Despite that players use skills from previous chambers to solve the last chambers, sometimes the logic acquired from previous puzzles

actually pulls the player away from her goal—instead of heading to the state of inertia, one has to further oneself into frustration.

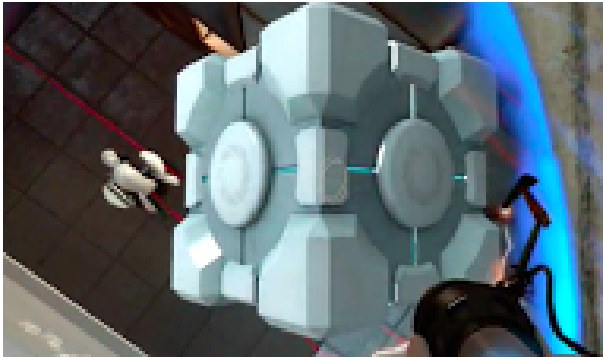


Figure 1. Storage cube and turret.

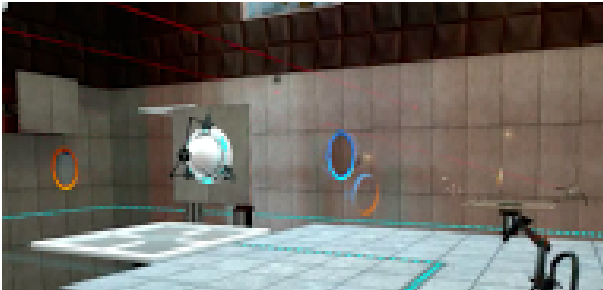


Figure 2. Chamber 18.



*Figure 3. Free-fall Chamber 18.*

Yet, one has to always consider that the easiest solution in subsequent puzzles after overcoming challenging parts of a puzzle often consists of considering an obvious response—in the room with the storage cube in Chamber 18th, this easy yet often overlooked solution is to think with portals and portal one’s way out of the room, therefore by passing the lifts taking the player from one side of the room to the desired location. Since it becomes more apparent that the chamber traps suggests some meaning beyond the façade, one wishes to further unravel the meaning behind the addicting feeling of nearly missing death to see what lies beyond the puzzle-solving. The unit operation of death as elusive self-mastery plays nicely in concomitant with GLaDOS’ sardonic reminders of death to Chell. While the player assumes GLaDOS is the enemy, her paradoxical statements hint

to an effective mindset to resolve the puzzle—that nothing is what it seems, including one’s successful completion of Chamber 19.

In context of GLaDOS’ reminder of Chell’s proximity to death, the player’s repeated attempts to successfully solve a puzzle contributes to the narrative of having Chell die and come back to life, having the similar consequence as revealed in GLaDOS’ wishes to torture her with her rebirth only to continue testing. While Chell’s experience of the game is to solve puzzles and maintain her life, the player’s experience of the game unfolds with each successful resolution in the chambers. While dying and reliving serves to push the narrative, the learning acquired through repeated failed attempts also engenders curiosity about the objects in the game and the implicit details in the narrative, such as GLaDOS’ paradoxical statements. While serving a purpose to show a sinister antagonist, players become accustomed to rethinking strategies to solve puzzles that they may become just as interested in the details in the dialogue as well.

While Chell does not comment or show any sign of being bothered by GLaDOS’ statements, the player questions if the progression of the chambers results in Chell’s escape or an explanation for GLaDOS’ empty promises other than motivating the player to prove her wrong. GLaDOS’ paradoxical statements demonstrate that she holds the answers to the signification chain formulated by her speech and various forms of visual images on the walls throughout the Science Center. One example is her paradoxical statement on portal devices and forward momentum signifies the double entendre of a player’s sense of control in mental exertion yet simultaneous confusion: “You appear to understand how a portal device affects forward momentum or to be more precise, how it does not.” Initially, one denies this statement, since the portal device enables one to strategically place portals to allow one to free-fall to one’s destination. Yet,

the statement is also valid in the sense that the portal device does not directly affect momentum; by giving the portal device agency in the sentence, it hides the fact that gravity provides effective free-falling, not the portal device itself. Indeed the notion of mastery and fallacy of mastery is a paradox itself—the more one achieves in the game, the more one perceives opportunities for failure.

One could argue that Clink Hocking's (2009) notion of ludic dissonance, in which the game mechanics make the player assume certain qualities they do not want if they follow the narrative, applies in the Portal narrative. After all, his sharp critique of Bioshock and Randian objectivism proves that the ludic contract of the game differs from the goals in the narrative contract, thus either compromising the player's willingness to progress in the game or play the game in a manner that compromises their desire to see the narrative unfold in a certain way. While his criticism for Bioshock cleverly depicts the misalignment between game mechanics and narrative, the paradoxes in the Portal series do not hinder the advancement of the game; rather, they entice players to curiously ponder their value beyond a ludic context, as seen in their relationship to the cake, companion cube, and potato—symbols of subversions of death.

### **Significant Symbols: The Cake, the Companion Cube, and the Potato**

Even though the cake and companion cube may function as objects that show GLaDOS' manipulation, they also function as symbolic items that blur the distinction between life and death. The game developer commentary in Portal:Still Alive and Portal 2 comments that one goal of such items is to elicit motivation to get back at GLaDOS, as seen in the use of the companion cube and having to destroy it. Yet, perhaps an issue that is

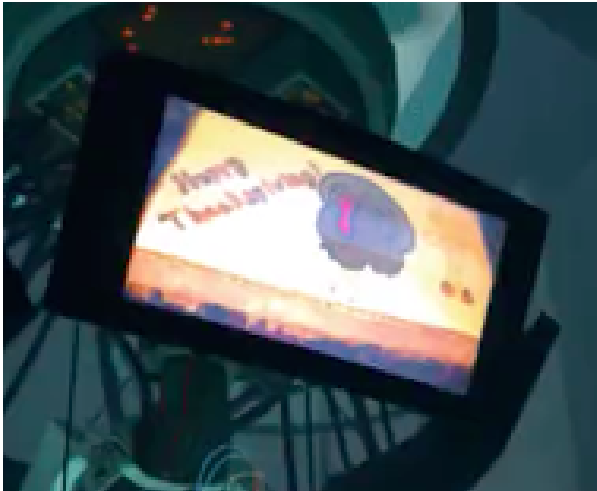


unaccounted for is that the players contribute to the ludic role of the such items and develop meaning about them.

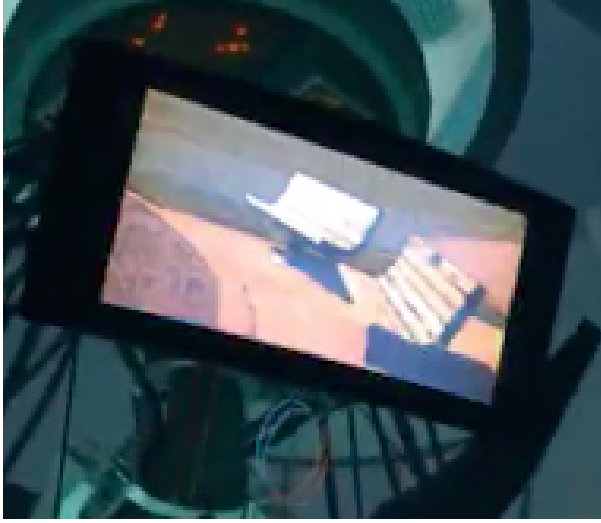
When the player/Chell confronts GLaDOS at the end of *Portal: Still Alive*, s/he notices the computer screens attached to the structures holding GLaDOS' body. The flash of images on her computer screen in her room demonstrates other links on this signification chain. Yet, if a player replays the game or finds an online walkthrough, s/he can better examine that the flash of images function as a collection of symbolic meaning to the significance of "the cake". Some images include different cakes—one has inscribed "Happy Thanksgiving" and another, "October 29th, 1982"—different animals, old forms of machinery, a piece of chocolate cake with pliers either above or alongside it, park benches, and an open computer circuit. While some players ascribe little or no meaning to these images, other players might perceive associated meanings between the idea of cake, a sweet desert item, and forms of technology. In addition to functioning as a collection of symbolic items, the cake itself is not necessarily an item that GLaDOS intends to offer. Rather, it is an object situated in a web of technological devices that she offers Chell, even though the player may spend additional time looking at the different pictures to decode it. Her promise of cake functions as a paradoxical statement that states that the promise of a cake is the association of sweet dessert given in the midst of puzzle solving within a scientific center.



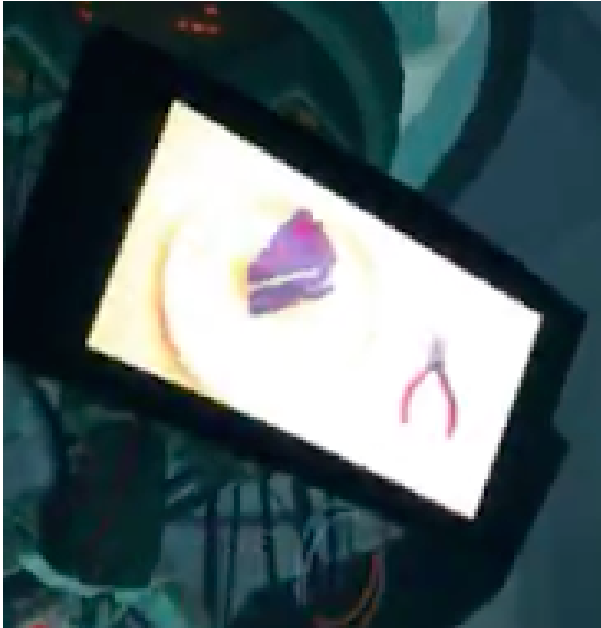
*Figure 4. October 29th 1982.*



*Figure 5. Happy Thanksgiving.*



*Figure 6. Park benches.*



*Figure 7. Cake with pliers.*



*Figure 8. Cow.*



*Figure 9. Computer chip.*



Figure 10. Primitive machinery.

The notion of sublimation in a psychoanalytic context helps explain the association of images with cake. Joan Copjec (2004) defines sublimation as that which inhibits the subject's drive from attaining satisfaction. The actual aim of a drive is to continue desiring, thus sublimation actually helps the subject achieve this aim, incidentally showing a transformative aspect of the object itself. The fact that the drive extends beyond an object, rather to an aim, explains for the notion that the subject seeks more objects as if creating a collection of desired objects (Copjec, 2004). Moreover, the drive to collect more objects refers back to the aforementioned cake images on GLaDOS' monitor at the concluding boss fight in *Portal*. The repetition of the cake images exemplifies a collection of different types of cakes yet never the cake itself. It opens the possibility that the cake is not an actual cake at all, rather the different meanings of the cake, as derived from GLaDOS' references to it and the images on the computer screen, refer to the idea that the cake stands in for something entirely different—cake as a paradoxical symbol of life and death. This relationship harkens Lacan's famous statement of the ultimatum between “your money or your life,” in which the choice for life entails a deprived life without money (Lacan, 1977, p. 212).

If one perceives the libidinal drive as a life force—as seen in the interconnection of libidinal drives and the association of feeding—it is possible to perceive the cake as a promise for life.

Yet the scene at the end of chamber 19—the icon of the cake and shortly after, the scene of the open fire—and the constant promise of cake throughout the game interconnects the notion of life and death. Chell never gets the cake, showing that each time the player successfully solves the puzzle, there might be a possibility that GLaDOS will give Chell the cake. Furthermore, the cake also represents a choice of life over death even though the tiny icon of cake on the wall of Chamber 19 flashes to the player before the view perceives the open fire pit. Since the cake also alludes to death, the promise for cake simultaneously and paradoxically functions as a reminder of death. The ambiguity in the equation of cake and death affirms the idea that death is an idea that is not entirely founded on a will to die. Humorously concealing her intentions when she initially confronts Chell in *Portal 2*, GLaDOS comments that she wishes to “reanimate the dead” after killing Chell only to continue more testing. Her comments refer to sublimation of the death drive, since death is not a fate she desires for Chell. Rather, she desires Chell’s cunning escape from death, causing GLaDOS to experience euphoric sensations—a sensation echoed within the player.

If taking the interpretation that GLaDOS desires Chell to live, the player perceives another similarity to another character’s admiration for Chell, yet it is expressed through obvious affirmations of life that simultaneously guide the player through gameplay. Doug Rattman, the mysterious scientist who leaves Chell clues for survival, extends his feelings about his beloved companion cube to Chell. By referring to Chell as “the angel who took the companion cube away,” Rattman gives Chell a positive association as an angelic heroine but also an extension of the admiration he expresses to his companion cube, as seen in the pictures of the companion cubes on bodies of pinup girls and historical figures in Test Chamber 17. Both examples of libidinal objects—objects signifying life—the companion cube and Chell are interestingly interconnected in another way.

According to the game developer commentary in *Portal: Still Alive* the mandatory destruction of the cube brought out GLaDOS' evil nature and helped players use the incinerator, yet players have perceived the cube as having different identities. In *Portal 2*, GLaDOS makes the companion cube explode twice and provide another one for Chell, thus suggesting that there are more companion cubes than the one Chell previously killed. By extending the comparison of the companion cube to Chell, Rattman could provide a clue to Chell that she is a clone as well. While it is not a theory that I entertain, the idea of Chell as a clone certainly addresses the sublimation of the death drive in that she cannot die. In *Portal: Still Alive*, after Chell escapes and is trying to find an exit, GLaDOS tells Chell that she has her brain scanned in the computer system in the event of a disaster. While some players might be distracted by game mechanics—the escape portion of the game requires that players look for optimal places to launch oneself out of rooms—GLaDOS' comment functions as a precursor to her comments to reanimate Chell from the dead. By suggesting that Chell could be restored, GLaDOS is also gesturing that Chell is a clone. Similar to the companion cube, Chell could be rebuilt and killed, hinting to the chamber in *Portal 2* when Chell/the player tries to grab the cube, which evaporates into air. The repetition of the many cubes is comparable to the idea that Chell's repeated life, especially when viewed in connection to the emphasis of Chell's return in GLaDOS' initial greeting to her in the first game, "Welcome again." Yet, other players theorize on the clues provided in the companion cube by further investigating the way that the cube is discussed in the game. Some game theorists perceive that the cubes are previous test subjects with speaking abilities.

In Game Theory's YouTube video, *Game Theory's Portal's Companion Cube has a Dark Secret*, the companion cube is described as comprising of former test subjects, who previously failed the tests that Chell/the player successfully solve, and the

former female scientists, or “Girls of Aperture Science” depicted as pin-up girls in the Rattman den in Chamber 17 to “(Game Theorists, 2013). Game Theorists presents an interesting idea about companion cubes as former humans, an idea that further supports my argument about the sublimation of the death drive. GLaDOS does mention that she has tons of companion cubes, just as the player perceives a lot of relaxation rooms for the numerous test subjects. Thus, this idea asserts that death is not the end goal for human life or artificial life. In addition to Chell being cloned and injured test subjects repurposed as companion cubes, GLaDOS herself functions as an example of sublimation of the death drive.

Echoing the theme of GLaDOS’ desire to repetitiously kill Chell and reanimate her, the potato functions as an embodiment of GLaDOS’ reincarnated identity. It should be prefaced that before Wheatley reawakens GLaDOS, he leads Chell to a room of children’s science projects, most of which are potato battery projects. The player examines the different projects as Wheatley disparages the volcano project and comments on the disaster of “Bring Your Daughter to Work Day,” the day the children brought their projects when GLaDOS locks the facility and fills it with her deadly neurotoxin. If the player looks carefully at one science project, s/he notices the name “Chell” written at the bottom of a white three-paneled display board. Chell’s project features a potato battery, but in place of the potato battery is an overgrown potato plant. At first, the player considers that it was a coincidence of potato projects, but events after this finding refer to the significance of the potato.

After Chell transfers Wheatley into GLaDOS’ body at his insistence, Wheatley puts GLaDOS’ micro-chip—or her mind—into a potato, and he dumps Chell and GLaDOS into a long descending tunnel that leads them to the Aperture Center’s underground and early history of the place, which will inevitably lead to discovering a cabinet filled with Cave Johnson’s early



awards in Potato Science. Thus, the potato interlinks the three characters—GLaDOS, Chell, and Cave Johnson, the CEO of Aperture Science Center—thus acting as a catalyst for many myths concerning Chell’s identity as adopted further alluded to in GLaDOS’ numerous comments to Chell. If Cave was a potato scientist and Chell’s child project was a potato battery, it leads players to consider that Chell has previous exposure to the Aperture Center prior to her test-taking days.

As an aside yet contributing explanation to the significance of the potato, the fact that her potato plant spawns the body for GLaDOS’ mind reinstates the idea that Chell is responsible for GLaDOS’ misfortunes and discomforts. In addition to eliciting sympathy from the players, the scene of GLaDOS’s stripping of power and denigration to the voltage of a potato battery and hence limited power shifts players’ perception of her as just a sinister opponent. While the potato functions as a reincarnated form for GLaDOS—first as Caroline, the devoted secretary, then as rogue AI GLaDOS, then GLaDOS as a passive potato—it also functions as a turning point for the player. While Chell never voices the distinction from evil GLaDOS to tragic GLaDOS, the player reinterprets GLaDOS’ character and her need to test when they watch her relive her own mechanical memory as a human who confirms her boss’ commands and devotion to him. The backstory of her devotion for him contributes to the player’s assessment of the goals of the Aperture Center, yet it also shows GLaDOS’ repression of such feelings in lieu of her intellectual rigorous desire for scientific testing. Even though she is ambiguous in her own claims to her humanity—as seen through her admission to deleting her Caroline from her system to her claim that Caroline resides in her—a player perceives a possibility for GLaDOS’ obsession with Chell. Even in the midst of her sarcasm, she notes that her human part was similar to Chell, possibly indicating some level of narcissistic identification with her and clarifying the reasons for her inability to kill Chell.

While the cake was a function of a libidinal sublimation or pleasure through mechanical manipulation, the potato functions as a symbol of the intersection of the organic and inorganic life—Chell’s overgrown plant and GLaDOS’ new body and GLaDOS’ existence as an AI and her human existence as Caroline. Aptly considered the more inconspicuous hot spot than the cake, the potato weaves the different elements of past, present, and future elements in the story. Whereas the cake signified a rouse for Chell and decoy for death, the potato completes the theme of death as an end. Similar to the role of the potato as a body for GLaDOS, the companion cube functions as a metaphor for Chell. While the cube does not shelter Chell’s mind—rather it is theorized to shelter previous test takers’ minds in other theories—it functions as an artifact whose significance is comparable to Chell’s being. Like the cake, the cube symbolizes an affirmation of life, yet the cube is Rattman’s desired object, a position that eventually transfers to his feelings towards Chell. While it means very little to GLaDOS, except in her assessment to taunt Chell’s violence towards others, the cube’s significance to the games asserts itself as the sole accompanying figure that could identify with the player. Instead of offering embodiment as the potato does to GLaDOS, it offers the player a metaphor for its synonymous relationship to Chell. Just as the cube accompanies Chell as a similar entity that silently helps to solve puzzles, Chell provides the player an effective body—a shell, if one wishes to use the playful pun—onto which one projects one’s experiences in the games.

Throughout the games, the opposition between organic and inorganic exposes the subliminal message that death does not clearly denote an end to living, rather it suggests transgression of it. Moreover, this unit operation, theme of transgression of death, asserts itself in different other details of the game, ranging from the necessary mindset in game mechanics to minor details in the visuals such as the different signs in the Aperture Center.

While some players may opt to simply solve puzzles, other players revel in finding meaning through exploring hidden themes that linger with the players long after they complete the game.

Nick Montfort makes an interesting comment on the game developers' ideas on *Portal's* narrative. After articulating *Portal: Still Alive's* unique interconnection of game mechanics and narrative, he gestures that players make meaning from the game despite the game developers' lack of referring to philosophical depth. Rather, by articulating that some games have conceptions as opposed to conveying concepts, Montfort demonstrates that conceptions are the initial trajectory of ideas. While it is not imperative that the cake, potato, and companion cube convey deep meanings to every player, perhaps I can assert that these items in the game infer deeper significance that offers a multi-level reading of the game through examination of the objects. Perhaps articulating reading of such objects creates larger discussions on the game series' abilities to start different conversations. Another possibility is that by reading deeper meaning from the objects—and therefore inferring a deeper narrative—I demonstrate that the games touch upon my sensory experience. Reflecting on the manner by which games function as expressions of creativity in puzzle solving, Henry Jenkins (2005) articulates that games provide new sensory experiences. While he discusses these new sensory experiences as typically combining play with skill development—a process of learning strategies by analyzing one's own tactile effect on the game interface—I expand upon this idea by including the process of investigating the meaning of certain game artifacts in relation to themes arising in the narrative. For some players, part of the sensory experience allows for deeper insights into the game artifacts, especially in the case of games with uniquely interconnected narrative elements and ludic experiences.

## References

Bogost, Ian.(2006). *Unit operations: an approach to videogame criticism*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Bogost, Ian.(2007). *Persuasive games: the expressive power of videogames*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Copjec, J.(2004). *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*. Boston: MIT Publishing.

Elganko.(2010, May 18). Portal Walkthrough part 4 (NO COMMENTARY). (video file). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ-MjyfnV5w>.

Elganko.(2010, May 21). Portal Walkthrough part 5 (NO COMMENTARY). (video file). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdJEr5eokN4>.

Elganko.(2010, May 28). Portal Walkthrough part 8 (NO COMMENTARY). (video file). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY\\_Tq6MswjY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY_Tq6MswjY).

Frasca, G.(2003). "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in M.J.P. Wolf & B. Perron's *The Video Game Theory Reader* (221-235), New York and London: Routledge.

Game Theorists.(2013, May 25). Game Theory: Portal's Companion Cube has a Dark Secret. [Video file]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5w6ieaTxGA&feature=youtu.be>.

Hocking, C.(2009). "Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock: The problem of what the game is about," in D. Davidson's (Ed.) *Well played 1.0: video games, value, and meaning*, (255-262), Pittsburg: ETC Press, downloaded at <http://etc.cmu.edu/etcpres/>

Jenkins, H.(2002). Jenkins, H.(2004). "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in K.S. Tekinbas & E. Zimmerman's (Eds.) *The games design reader: a rules of play anthology*, (670-689), Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jenkins, H.(2005) "Games, the New Lively Art," in J. Goldstein and J. Raessen's *Handbook of Computer Game Studies* (pp.175-192), Cambridge: MIT Press.

Juul, J.(2003). *The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness*. In M. Copier & J. Raessen (Eds.), (Vol. 30-45). Presented at the *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings*. Retrieved from [www.jesperjuul.net](http://www.jesperjuul.net).

Kinder, M.(2002). *Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever: Bunuel's Legacy for New Digital Media Interactive Database Narrative*. *Film Quarterly*, 55(4), 2-15.

Lacan, J.(1973). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. (J. A. Miller, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Lacan, J.(1986). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*. (J. A. Miller, Trans.). New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Montfort, N.(2009). "Portal of Ivory, Passage of Horn," in D. Davidson's (Ed.) *Well played 1.0: video games, value, and meaning*, (221-234), Pittsburgh: ETC Press, downloaded at <http://etc.cmu.edu/etcpres/>

Ryan, Marie-Laure.(2002). "Beyond Myth and Metaphor: Narrative in Digital Media," in *Poetics today*, 23(4), 581-609.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Profs. Steve Mamber and Prof. Doug Kellner and the editors who helped me refine ideas and ways to articulate my perspective in this article.