Chapter 4

Returning to Hogwarts: The Modality Of Computer Games

The box of the computer game of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Electronic Arts, 2002) addresses us in a way no text other than a computer game can. It says: 'DARE YOU RETURN TO HOGWARTS? BE HARRY POTTER™ AND UNLOCK THE MYSTERY AT THE HEART OF THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS.' We can look at this exhortation in terms of the system known as *modality* – how texts make truth-claims, claims for credibility. As Kress and van Leeuwen point out (1996), these claims are not part of the *representational* function of the text; they are not representing an objective truth in the world. Rather, they are part of the *orientational* function – they are the text's attempt to address its audience as part of a community which shares a set of beliefs about how the world is.

In the statement above, then, the modality stakes its claim to truth on a kind of believable fiction – that the listener will assent to the demand, and agree to pretend to be Harry Potter. This is a dramatic modality, central to role-playing and action adventure games where the player controls a character in the game. Ordinary narrative lays out a series of events as statements: the indicative mood in language, which the French narratologist Gerard Genette says is the natural mood of narrative (Genette, 1980). This invitation to join the game is expressed as a command: 'BE Harry Potter'. The imperative mood may be the natural mood of games.

The exhortation contains two names: Harry Potter and Hogwarts. No sense can be made of these without an intertextual understanding, which allows us to recognise

them as, respectively, a boy wizard and his school of witchcraft and wizardy. This can only be credible in a community which recognises the modality of fantasy – an impossible world which we agree, in certain ways, to treat as real. We also know that fantasy is a form of fiction with a particular historical role in children's literature and film, and that it may be believable to children for different reasons and in different ways than will be the case with adults.

Finally, this game will also contain a modality value related to how authentic it seems as a game. The modality of games as cultural events is always an issue. The spectacle of wrestling, for instance, projects a contested modality, so that fans or practitioners of 'real' amateur wrestling will perceive the professional wrestling of the WWF as a dramatic fiction.

In the case of *the Chamber of Secrets* this kind of authenticity may be judged against two quite separate generic characters of the game: its credibility as a roleplaying or adventure game; and its credibility as a transformation of a Harry Potter narrative. Experienced gamers may judge the game on its authenticity as a game; while Harry Potter fans, conversely, might judge the game on how faithful it is to the other parts of the franchise. This reviewer recognises the tension:

> The game does follow the book and may trigger some wonderful memories of J.K. Rowling's amazing work. The good news is that the game follows the story. Like the Fellowship of the Ring ... this is also somewhat limiting to the overall gameplay. (www.gamezone.com).

Following van Leeuwen, we will regard this kind of modality as *presentational*, that is the claim of the text to be true to its genre, as distinct from its represented world:

> In the case of representation, 'truth' means 'a true representation of the people, places and/or things represented', in the case of presentation it means 'true to the spirit of the genre, and the values which underpin it in its context.' (van Leeuwen, 1999)

Because computer games are hybrid forms, they construct hybrid modalities. A good deal of debate in the field of games studies revolves around a perceived opposition between narratology (the study of narrative) and ludology (the study of games). This chapter will take the simple way out of this dilemma by assuming that roleplaying and action adventure games necessarily combine the two. However, as well as providing the mainspring for the game's interactive pleasures, this also causes complex modality tensions.

We will analyse the game, then, from two perspectives – the *narrative* and the *ludic* (as well as considering its presentational modality). In assessing how these two systems build the hybrid modality of the game, we will refer to Kress and van Leeuwen's notion of how modal orientations are proposed by a text and judged by an audience (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). They suggest four modality coding orientations:

- *naturalistic* – in which the text's truth claim and the audience's judgment of it are based in representational similarity to the natural world or aspects of it

- *sensory* – in which modality is based on how effective the text is in eliciting an emotional response through appeal to different sensory channels
- *abstract* – the modality of high art and science, for instance, which aim to represent essences of things through sparse, stripped down signs (the opposite, in a way, of the naturalistic modality)
- *technological* – the modality based on utility, as in a technical manual or a map.

Though Kress and van Leeuwen's schema are applied to visual modes, van Leeuwen uses the same framework to analyse the modalities of music and sound (van Leeuwen, 1999). We will see how it can be adapted for the multiplicity of modes integrated in the computer game.

Before beginning the analysis, we should indicate why analysing computer games might be relevant to educational research. There are, broadly, two perspectives in the literature relating games to education. One is largely social, looking at how games feature in the cultural lives of young people; and sometimes highlighting gendered uses of games in which girls are disadvantaged (Orr-Vered, 1998; Mackereth and Anderson, 2000). The other perspective is to view games as a form of communicative competence or literacy, linked to the development of print literacy (Beavis, 2001; McClay, 2002). The framework we propose in this chapter allows for the analysis of games as semiotic systems, either to consider what they offer children; or to consider how children engage with them (perhaps in conjunction with an empirical study of players); or to consider how they might be understood as a textual form worthy of inclusion in the curriculum.

Narrative modality

The game presents its narrative through two forms of the kineikonic, or moving image, mode – interactive and non-interactive. In semiotic terms, non-interactive elements of the text will require the player to read and interpret the information on the screen, but not necessarily to produce any external semiotic transformations. If external signs (spoken comment, laughter, writing) are produced, they will not be returned into the semiotic system of the text. Interactive elements, by contrast, can only work by the production of external signs by the player which *are* returned into the game system, which then responds, the player responding again to this response, and so on (the feedback loop or information loop of Human-Computer Interaction theory).

The non-interactive kineikonic

This is the mode of the 'cut-scenes' – short films which fulfil various functions, most importantly, filling in narrative information, and giving instructions about how to play the game. However, the narrative information, visual style and temporal flow all interrelate with the interactive sequences, so the two must be considered together.

As in the interactive elements of the game, the cut scenes project a general modality which corresponds to the naturalistic coding orientation of Kress and van Leeuwen. This orientation, they suggest, will be set up in the text (and judged by the viewer) using *modality configurations* which express degrees on a scale which allows for

higher or lower modality in each parameter. Of the eight configurations they propose, we will select three:

- Articulation of detail
- Articulation of background
- Colour saturation

We will apply these to an image from a cut scene in which the Professor of Defence against the Dark Arts, Gilderoy Lockhart, is teaching Harry and the rest of the class to duel using magic spells. In respect of the three modality configurations, we can make the following observations.

- Detail is clearly articulated in the character design; Lockhart has blond, wavy hair, his eyes blink naturalistically; the buttons on his yellow coat are clearly defined. However, we recognise this as as animation which, while in some respects its aspires to the naturalistic modality of photographic realism, has a distinctive visual aesthetic which has become part of the stylistic conventions of computer games, perceived by players as ‘graphics’ rather than as, say, video.
- The articulation of the background presents a high naturalistic modality (we can even see the fine-grained texture of the stone walls in the Defence against the Dark Arts classroom).
- The colours are bright, highly-saturated.

Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that colour saturation and articulation of detail greater than the photographic standard of the time presents a modality which moves beyond the ‘real’, provoking a sense of ‘more-than-real which they associate with

fantasy genres. Here, this kind of hyper-real modality (with the less-than-real animation) is part of the construction of fantasy, a world that is imaginary, but also brighter and more solid than the physical world we inhabit – or at least than images judged to be accurate representations of that world.

The game, like the book and film, shows children who both are and are not like real children. Many children's fantasies over the last hundred years construct a mixed modality of fantasy and realism, by combining signifiers of social reality such as contemporary dress and speech codes with signifiers of fantasy. E Nesbit's novels are a good example, mixing the speech patterns and realist settings of Edwardian childhood with fantasy images of phoenixes and flying carpets. CS Lewis's novels adopt a similar strategy; and JK Rowling follows this tradition. Harry's broomstick, the Nimbus 2000, is a semiotic yoking together of signifiers which suggest an object belonging both to a world of fantasy and magic, and to a world of contemporary logo-branded sports gear.

The cut scenes continue this mixed modality, as we have seen. The visual design makes fantasy believable through an exaggerated naturalism. The player is positioned as a child character with a particular relation to the adult world; that of a pupil, in the scene discussed above. Elsewhere we are addressed by the voice of the narrator, the UK comic actor Stephen Fry, whose use of a slightly old-fashioned received pronunciation and mellifluous tones convey a reassuring adult presence. The players are invited to take their places as child-listeners waiting for a narrative whose style and tone of address confirms a particular kind of representation of English childhood, in which logfires blaze, manorial buildings offer refuge from the stultifying dullness

of suburban life, and orphaned children find a new family in the fantasy world of wizards, and the peer-companionship of the boarding school. By contrast, the vaguely London accents of the non-player child-characters (except Hermione) suggest the more diverse school population of the contemporary state comprehensive school.

We will also make some brief observations about the modalities of sound, movement and spatio-temporal structures in this sequence.

The sound combines a high naturalistic modality (speech pitch and dynamics synced with the image suggesting a ‘real’ person; footsteps and other naturalistic sounds) with music derived from the film, built around an abstract-sensory modality suggesting magic and the supernatural (through a haunting minor melody, with eerie string instrumentation) as well as childhood (through the associations of ¾ time, and this particular melody, with nursery rhyme and lullaby) .

The movements are, like all those in the cut scenes, in principle unrestricted. Because these scenes are not part of the gameplay, or interactive in any way, they can represent movement unrestrictedly, like any animation. Here, Lockhart’s movements are largely gestural, and complement the naturalistic modality of the visual design and the dialogue.

Temporally and spatially, the cut scenes are constructed according to the conventions of continuity editing (see Bordwell and Thompson, 2001). Time and space are fragmented in shots, which are then edited together to construct an effect of continuous present time, as in this sequence. Though this chopping-up of time is by

no means an analogue of real-world time and space, continuity editing presents it as such, and we learn to read it as such; to assent, in effect, to a naturalistic modality.

In summary, we can see that the different modes of the kineikonic complement each other to build a high naturalistic modality, which at times exceeds the natural, suggesting the more-than-real world of fantasy. We will also judge this by what we know of real schools and fictional schools – a combined modality of what we recognise as like our school experience and like the rather different school experience of Harry Potter (and the boarding-school genre of children's fiction), in which we agree to believe – or not.

Alongside this representational modality is the different modality of the game's claim to authenticity as a game, its *presentational* modality.

The detailed articulation of the visual design produces a credible-looking computer game. In this player review, the basis for the modality judgement of the visual design (under the heading 'graphics') is a judgment about how the game presents itself as a game, so that it becomes the kind of judgment of authenticity, or presentational modality, we described earlier:

> Graphics: TERRIFIC! The art direction on this project is EXCELLENT! This is a visually stunning game!
> (www.videogamereview.com)

Presentationally, cut scenes may be judged in drastically differing ways: by players who enjoy the cinematic quality of games, for whom a high modality would rest on the feeling that the game allows them to become part of a movie; or by players for whom the formal systems of the game produce the highest modality, so that the cut scenes become a pointless distraction from the game. Game designers recognise these two orientations – many games, including this one, both lavish considerable design effort on the cut scenes, and include in the game a simple mechanism for the player to skip them, in this case by pressing the 'enter' key.

From cut scene to gameplay – the player-avatar link

However, cut scenes and game play cannot simply be analysed as independent elements – they are clearly interrelated, and able to affect each other's semiotic structures, including modality systems, so that, ideally, the gameplay takes on a little more of the cinematic quality while the cut scene acquires some of the features of the game.

Like many games, this one trains its players at the outset of the game. Trainee players are often positioned in game culture and by the text as 'newbies', through linguistic or visual representations of the ideas of training, initiation, newness. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, these representations are associated with the game's representations of school. The player is trained in the use of spells by teachers in the narrative, attending lessons in spellcraft of various kinds, invited to become game-trainee and Hogwarts pupil simultaneously.

In this cut scene, then, the game, through the figure of Gilderoy Lockhart, says ‘There are three spells you may use in duelling ...’, and continues to instruct Harry how to duel against Draco Malfoy.

There are two kinds of second-person address here – the use of the word ‘you’ in Lockhart’s dialogue; and the way the image looks out of the screen at us – what Kress and van Leeuwen call ‘a kind of visual you’. The conventions of continuity editing tell us that Lockhart is addressing Harry, since the images of Lockhart talking are intercut with ‘reaction shots’ of Harry, Ron and Hermione listening. However, as Lockhart’s instructions proceed, something odd happens, disrupting the modality and orientation of the text. Lockhart tells us that the power of the spell cast by the wand can be increased by holding down the left mouse button. It is as if the mechanisms of address in the text suddenly turn outwards, as we realise that, though the character of Harry is being addressed by Lockhart, we, who hold the mouse, are also being addressed.

At this point, the representational and orientational structures of the text operate to pull together Harry and the player. We are about to become Harry through the dramatic guise of the avatar. (‘Avatar’, the word for the player-controlled character in a game, is derived from a Sanskrit word denoting the descent of a god to earth in human form).

We can say three things about modality here.

Firstly, games do not operate the same kind of naturalistic modality as films, or mentioning the computer hardware would be completely unacceptable, as if a cowboy in a Western were to look out of the screen and tell the projectionist to change the reel. As we shall see, games involve a combination of naturalistic, sensory and technological modalities, and players learn to combine these – so the instruction about the mouse is simply a part of the technological modality running alongside the naturalistic modality of the kineikonic mode.

Secondly, however, the explicit mention of the mouse is strictly a part of this technological orientation as it is constructed in the early part of the game. The modality of the game expects players, in this training phase, to learn explicitly about the technological utility of the controls, very like someone learning to drive. And just as drivers later manage the controls in ways we describe as ‘intuitive’, ‘unconscious’, ‘without thinking’, ‘automatic’, so the developing modality of the game encourages us to forget the controls, so that by the time we are fighting the big battles against Aragog the giant spider, or the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, we are barely aware of the mouse. The technological modality is judged by how unobtrusive it is, so that it blends with the naturalistic – the computer mediation is meant to become invisible, and we feel we are really firing off spells or wielding the sword of Gryffindor.

Thirdly, the language of Lockhart’s dialogue contains specific modality cues. The use of the word ‘You’ raises the ludic modality as we are included as participants in the systems of game and narrative. The word ‘may’ is a modal auxiliary, part of the system of modality in language which expresses degrees of certainty. In this case,

though it seems to produce a weak modality within what is basically a set of instructions, it may be there to soften what is actually an imperative: ‘Use these three spells’. Dressing up a command as an invitation is typical of the language of teachers, who need to be sensitive about how instructions are felt by pupils; and in this respect, it is an appropriate representation of a teacher at Hogwarts talking to Harry Potter. However, games are also, in many ways, sets of instructions – rule-governed systems which tell us what to do. But modality systems determine how we want to perceive these rules, an obvious example being the imposition of a penalty by a football referee, perceived as fair (high modality) by one team’s supporters, and unfair (low modality) by the other’s. Similarly, the instructions offered by the ludic pedagogy of *the Chamber of Secrets* will seem like an exciting invitation to those who subscribe to its world, culture and community; and constraining, clumsy, imperious or patronising to those who do not.

As the cut scene finishes, we move into a gameplay sequence, in this case the duel of Harry against Draco. In the next section, we will consider how the modality of gameplay integrates the kineikonic modality systems we have already looked at with other systems, so that narrative and game are fused.

Ludic Modality

The gameplay sequences operate hybrid modalities, which can to some extent be analysed using three of Kress and van Leeuwen’s categories: naturalistic, sensory, and technological.

Naturalistic

A part of this modality is created using the same resources as in the cut scenes – visual detail, background articulation, high colour saturation, use of naturalistic sounds and, in all of this, a tendency to move the naturalism higher up the scale towards the more-than-real register of fantasy.

However, there are important structural differences, which make the sense of reality, or the credibility of this fantasy world, differently constructed. Most importantly, we are now working the controls of the avatar, and imagine ourselves as Harry Potter, if the modality is high enough in our judgement.

Firstly, we observe that the image typical of the cutscene – a face looking out of the screen at us (to offer, instruct, inform) – has been reversed. The typical image of the game-sequences contains, in the foreground, the figure of Harry seen from behind, so that we look over his shoulder at the scene confronting us. As in most action adventure games (one of the best-known being the *Tomb Raider* series), the player is located in a fixed position with respect to the avatar, placed immediately behind him. This means we are always facing the same way as Harry, at one remove from looking through his eyes. This position constructs a complex sense that the player is both identified with Harry Potter and at one remove from him, able to watch him, but linked with him like a shadow.

Secondly, we can now perform a limited repertoire of actions: RUN (forwards, backwards, left and right); JUMP; CAST SPELLS. This is a *restricted set*; unlike the

actions depicted in the cut scenes, where, precisely because actions do not depend on the limitations of player controls, Harry can do anything. The point of gameplay is that the character can perform very few actions, which are wielded with skill by players. The linguist MAK Halliday described the 'restricted language' of games, his example being contract bridge, where limited formulae in the bidding system offer a meaning potential. Saying 'three clubs' in the right circumstances would, in spite of the restricted nature of the resources, represent considerable skill (Halliday, 1974). The player develops the skills to employ the 'language' of Harry's action repertoire to engage in typical gamelike activities – exploring, puzzle-solving, quest-like activities, combat, collecting.

Though the modality invoked here is a technological one – the gameplay is credible if it gets us through the obstacle course – it also links with the naturalistic modality of the world represented by the moving image. It might seem that the limited, formulaic set of actions would lower the naturalistic modality, making the avatar look artificial, mechanical, inhuman. In fact, for players who base their modality judgments on evaluations of this repertoire compared with other games offering more variety, such a judgment is possible, as in this review:

> Gameplay: The gameplay is BORRRRRRING. It's a lot like watching paint dry. Walk around .... LOAD ..... walk around some more ..... LOAD ..... collects some frog, beans or balloons ... LOAD ..... Solve a puzzle ..... walk around again ..... get the picture?
> (www.videogamereview.com)

When we consider that this player is the same one who enthused over the visual design of the game, we can see that the hybrid modalities of game and narrative can produce violently mixed modality judgments in players.

However, the restricted repertoire of movements is not necessarily experienced as limiting. Though the meaning potential looks sparse, every move is different, because it causes a different conjunction of the moving character and a part of the gameworld. So, the same move forward in different contexts can bring us to a yawning precipice, through the lab of Professor Snape, between the tentacles of the Venomous Tentacula plant, up to a schoolmate who offers to trade with us, or into contact with a bubbling cauldron where Harry will mix a health-restoring potion. These moves are two-term syntagms (sequences of signs), consisting of a single movement forwards (the up arrow key on the PC keyboard), combined with an object in the gameworld. Each combination implies a different action in the player perception where in mechanical terms there is only one, so the semiotic value of the single movement is expanded from ‘move forward’ to ‘teeter’, ‘tiptoe’, ‘dash’, ‘approach’, ‘mix’, in the situations described above.

Two signifying systems associated with the kineikonic are in play here. Firstly, the succession of syntagms combining represented Actor and location or background through animated movement; secondly, the camera positions which locate the viewer. Unlike the conventional kineikonic structures, which are fixed at the point of viewing, these structures are dynamic, and controlled by the player. So the sense of ‘teetering’ created by the combination of a move forward and a precipice is enhanced if the player rotates the camera vertically (using the mouse, in the PC version) so as to look

down on Harry's head, and directly into the precipice. In many ways, this is a naturalism completely the opposite to the conventions of continuity editing. Space and time are no longer constructed by disjuncture and editing, but by continuous exploration of 3-D space. This is 'realtime' – there can be no contraction, expansion or omission. In cinematic terms, it is like a continuous single take.

While the modality dominant in all of these examples continues to be the heightened naturalism of fantasy, this needs to be complemented by a notion of dramatic modality: the modality contract between game and player is more like drama than it is like a picture, a book or a film. We agree, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, to pretend to be Harry Potter, to play a role. Brenda Laurel (1993) and Janet Murray (1997) both imagine computer gameplay as being like a theatre audience who are allowed to step over the edge of the stage and play a part. Many of the modality configurations we have described should contribute to a high dramatic modality. On the other hand, there are elements of the game's systems which may serve to detract from the dramatic sense of 'being' Harry. One obvious one is that the game engine constructs Harry as a single player character, where in other games the player can control a team of characters. This results in Harry's missions being rather isolated affairs – he only communicates with Hermione and Ron in the cut scenes, that is, not at all as far as the player's participation is concerned. Some of the affective satisfaction of a group of children pitting their wits agains the adult world in a spirit of comradeship is necessarily undermined by the solo avatar structure, which might lower the dramatic modality for players to whom the representations of friendship in the book and film are important.

Sensory modality

Literally, of course, we are only inputting mechanical instructions which are processed by the game engine. The modality here, then, depends on our interpretation of these events through the semiotic guise of the game – the images and sounds clothing the skeleton of the game-system. The higher the modality, the more we believe we are 'really' running, climbing, falling, mixing, fighting, and flying. Here is an example of a player for whom the combination of the naturalistic modality of the semiotic guise and the technological modality of the interactive controls produces a high sensory modality:

> Graphics were better than i imagined. When you fly your broom around hogwarts the detail is very crisp and clear. Down to the water splashing in your face when flying close to the lake.
> (www.videogamereview.com)

There is no sense here that the player is at all aware of the fact that the 'flying' is 'really' the pressing of four directional keys on a control. When the feeling of being completely involved in the game is as strong as in this example, the modality shifts. This is not just a feeling that the gameworld seems real; it is a sensory, emotional response. This very high sensory modality seems to depend, in turn, on a naturalistic orientation and a technological orientation, in Kress and van Leeuwen's terms. It may even be that the interactive element requires a new conception of modality based in the experience of 'flow' – perhaps a *sensory-kinaesthetic* orientation, where the

emotional rush of acting in the represented world depends on the playability of the controls as well as the visual detail, 3-D rendering, enhanced sound and the other articulations that serve as cues for the naturalistic and sensory modalities.

Technological modality

The sensory experience of this player depends on the credible blend of naturalistic image and sound (the kineikonic mode) with a technological modality which depends on the invisibility of the controls. However, to believe wholeheartedly in the game is not only to become immersed in a naturalistic modality. Other elements of the game are represented by much less naturalistic visual design. At any time in the game, the player can move from the gameworld to the inventory screen, which is a typical generic element of roleplaying games.

The inventory (like the map screen, also typical of the RPG genre) operates Kress and van Leeuwen's technological coding orientation. Here, a lack of detail, icon-like representation of objects or processes, and flat colour construct the modality, judged by how clearly and usefully we can see and deploy the resources available to us in the game. So, for instance, at the top left hand side, the combination of image (a flask) and number (1) tell us we have one potion left with which to restore life to our character. When we move back into the game, we may need to drink this potion in order to survive a battle. The link is indicated by the lightning flash graphic at the top of the game screen, which tells us how much health we have left. If the narrative modality is high, we are likely to believe in this feeling of health; and the sense of urgency this injects into the performance of actions, especially in the combat

sequences, shifts us from a technological modality back into the play between the naturalistic modality of the game-narrative (believing we are Harry Potter) and the sensory modality of performing his actions, itself enhanced by our adrenalin rush as the health meter runs down.

The technological modality is clearly signalled by our active representative on the screen, which is no longer the avatar, but the cursor (though in the form of a wand, to represent the avatar symbolically). As in Lockhart's mention of the mouse, the technological modality happily acknowledges the computer-mediated nature of the gameplay.

This modality is likely to be judged on a number of scales in computer games. One scale is what we will call dynamic density – what number and variety of functions can be performed. Another might be ludic or narrative versatility – how many different actions a single function can achieve. On these kinds of measure, the central technologies of the game – the avatar movements, the wand targeting, and the health restoration, might be predicted to produce a high ludic and narrative modality, as we have seen in the case of the player for whom these modalities in turn produced a sensory experience. They are economic functions which, in combination with the gameworld, produce a wide and satisfying diversity of events.

The inventory, by contrast, might produce a low ludic modality. It contain a very restricted dynamic density: the map contains little detail; the objects represented on the inventory screen are there to inform rather than to be manipulated. A major function is to allow players to check on how many 'wizard cards' they have collected,

which suggests that the modality of the inventory is designed to appeal to the collecting instinct in children, much as the Pokemon phenomenon did. This aspect of the technological modality appeals to the presentational authentity of the game as a part of its audience's culture, rather than on the basis of its truth to the book or film.

Conclusion: the modality of children's games

The overall modality of the game, then, depends on the articulation of these three modal orientations. The *technological* allows us to feel we can control the game and manage its economies; the *naturalistic* allows us to blend the narrative and the player-controlled actions, and projects the fantasy world of Hogwarts; the *sensory* reaches its peak at the moments when the blend of narrative action and game-system works best. It seems that the high naturalistic modality of the 3-D visual environment, allied with the high technological and sensory modalities of the player-controlled events, can produce a vivid dramatic experience of being Harry Potter, in the fantasy world of Hogwarts. However, we have also seen that such modality structures offer meaning potentials to players, who might judge either the overall modality of the game or its constituent modalities, quite differently. While in some cases the blend of naturalistic and technological modalities may create a convincing sense of dramatic engagement with the avatar and his world, in other ways it may not, as in the isolation of Harry from Hermione and Ron by the solo avatar structure.

We have also seen that the authenticity claim, or presentational modality, is a wider one, intertextual both in its reference to the Harry Potter franchise more generally, and

in its reference to other games. As a game, the combination of naturalistic, sensory and technological modalities seem to be satisfying, but to offer in some cases experiences which are clearly directed at the game-culture of younger children, such as the collecting mechanisms, and the simplicity of the single player-character. Here, clearly, modality judgments will depend on the community the player belongs to.

As a component in the wider Harry Potter text family, the game's modality appeal both draws on and is measured by the profound credibility of the books for large numbers of children, producing the kind of fan communities more typical of popular TV and film series (Borah, 2003). This brand loyalty, expressive of a kind of generic baseline modality, remains steady even where the game specifically is found wanting – indeed, it seems to be a modality standard against which the game is judged:

> Then I got into Hogwarts and realised this was not the game for me. First off, at night at least, the place is roaming with ghosts. I figured the ghosts were there for atmosphere. In the book the spirits are by and large friendly and unobtrusive (the poltergeist excepted of course :)). Here, they will harm you if you contact one!
>
> (www.videogamereview.com)

For this player, the naturalistic and sensory modalities are high – even too high – while the presentational modality of the game and its truth to the book is low.

In the end, we cannot say in what specific ways children will respond to the mix of fantasy and realist modalities in the game without extending our research to an

empirical study of child players. However, we can at least say that the mix is there on offer in the text, extended into a participatory, dramatic experience by the sensory and technological modalities of the game.

Methodological points

1. It is difficult to subject a computer game to textual analysis in the same way as a film or book, since the text only exists as gameplay sessions, which are always different. Options open to the researcher are to relate the analysis to screen grabs, as we have done here; or to record gameplay sessions, either with a camera over the player's shoulder, or using screen capture software, which can produce the gameplay session as a multimedia format movie. This will, of course, not simply produce the game as a text to be analysed, but will produce a particular traversal by a player, offering another dimension for analysis.
2. To extend the research investigation into the player's experience, many possibilities are open. The researcher can observe and film the players during play (see Schott and Horrell, 2000). The players can be interviewed, and the interviews analysed within the multimodal framework (see chapter 5).
3. Or the researcher can collect examples of players' online cultures, from review websites, tribute websites, online communities, and so on. If online games are being analysed, the researcher will, of course, meet other players within the game, in the form of avatars, which raises the intriguing possibility of interviewing players online in role! These interviews can, of course, be

recorded using screen capture software, as described above. There are questions to think about in online research relating to the researcher's role and presence – do you announce your identity as a researcher; do you regard your presence as a digital equivalent of the participant observer role in ethnographic research; or do you behave as a bona fide member of the online community, and conceal your research identity? These are questions of researcher role and ethics which are only just beginning to be addressed in the context of the internet.