The Hunt for the First-Person Shooter.

Video Game Historiography Through the Lens of a Critical Etymology

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In a recent New York Times feature, Daniel Engber sets out to answer the question: "Who Made That First-Person-Shooter Game?" (2014). The article celebrates the release in the early 1990s of id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*, and more specifically the perspective "shift" they are said to have introduced in the video game world. "That shift changed the way that people played", proclaims Engber, echoing John Carmack's self-congratulatory statements quoted throughout. This is, after all, part of the "innovation" series in the journal.

Wolfenstein 3D and *Doom* indeed mark a turning point in the history of games: since their release, the first-person shooter genre has been increasingly present in the media landscape. For better and for worse, FPS games quickly became the poster child of video game culture. The amount of products marketed with the generic tag and the repeated success of FPS franchises in Christmas season top-seller lists are but a few indicators of the genre's popularity within the community. The fascination goes beyond its commercial success and significance in the expansion of the video game industry. It embodies the dedication of computer engineers to develop and refine a lifelike simulation of visual perception. It is also a privileged outlet for consequence-free violent behavior and has been at the center of moral outcries for this celebration of destruction. According to Bob Rehak, graphical sophistication and visceral action are largely accountable for the "powerful immersive effect" associated with the genre (2008: 187).

In game studies, first-person shooters have been the focus of many contributions. Two chapters of *Screenplay. Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces* (2002) take interest in the genre. Its textual presence as the only generic tag in the table of contents is rather surprising, since its visual aspect – a continuous point of view shot, in cinematic terms – is one of the least cinema-like. Alexander Galloway dedicates a significant portion of his *Essays* to the "Origins of the First-Person Shooter" (2006), and the finer details of this origin story are now easily accessible thanks to Tristan Donovan's account (2010). More recently, The FPS became one of the only genres to be singled out as the focus of a full anthology (Voorhees et

al., 2012).[1] Discussions on the concept of avatar have found an interesting case study with first-person shooters, as we can see in Victor Navarro's contribution (2012), in Michael Hitchens' survey of FPS protagonists (2011), all the way back to Rehak's contribution to the *Video Game Theory Reader* (2008). Here again the focus seems paradoxical: the visual presence of the avatar, in comparison with non first-person games, is quite minimal. As the Rehak quote in the previous paragraph made obvious, the genre is often associated with the popular concept of immersion, which is commonly defined as the perceptual illusion of non-mediation.

As we can see, the FPS genre has received a lot of historical and scholarly attention. The goal of this paper is not to discuss theoretical or psychological models of immersion or refine our factual knowledge of the genre's history. While the introductory quote from the *New York Times* feature might suggest otherwise, the questions we set out to answer were built from historical knowledge that is already available: the fascination for visual illusion and violence have merged in video game history a long time before the commercial explosion of id Software games at the beginning of the 1990s. In fact, game configurations that correspond to our modern understanding of "first-person shooter" can be traced back to traditions predating video games by many centuries in some aspects. In this context, one might wonder why the expression "first-person shooter" surfaced much later, what other expressions were commonly used to talk about similar game configurations, and what pressures from the encompassing game culture triggered such a change. It is our belief that a critical etymology can be a useful method to shed light not only on the development of specific discursive practices in marketing circles, but also on the interactions between this discourse and game culture, including gameplay configurations and players expectations.

Methodology

In order to conduct research on these aspects, this paper greatly benefited from the increasing availability of peri/paratextual elements such as dedicated magazines, game manuals and boxes, and various forms of advertisement. Obviously, documenting the rise of the expression "first-person

[1] In cinema and literature studies, the concept of genre and generic corpuses have been discussed extensively. While generic tags have proliferated further in game communities (for instance to underscore gameplay motifs or technological determinants), very few volumes have been dedicated entirely to specific video game genres. For instance, *Horror Video Games* (Perron, 2009) focusses on a thematic genre whose fascination is well established outside the gaming world.

shooter" alone in these sources would lead to trivial results. Research has been conducted with a methodical approach. The first step has been to consult community-made listings of games that are associated with the genre.[2] From these listings, extensive research has been conducted in marketing sources to document the use of "first-person / first-person shooter", but also to situate these expressions in a network of interconnected textual occurrences. Moreover, the games themselves had to be experienced to some extent in order to make connections between textual occurrences and specific gameplay elements. This created a significant amount of information to process for a single researcher. Moreover, many of these games (such as mainframe games from the 1970s and arcade games) are not readily available. Consequently, firsthand experience with the original games has been supplemented with emulation and audiovisual archives. Although audiovisual traces don't provide first hand access, are often captured from emulators, and are prone to many distortions (even if we only consider the audiovisual aspects), it has been argued that they represent a great resource to explore a wider scope of game history for researchers (Therrien, 2012; Newman, 2012).

Following this extensive research, a textual network has been mapped out. It includes expressions such as "3-D", "perspective", "virtual reality", "pilot view", "free exploration", "shooting" and "action". Whenever possible, we tried to integrate information about the use of these expressions in other media practices (from well-established visual arts to experimental VR designs), but admittedly this goal should be developed more extensively. Throughout the research, it became obvious that there is a contemporary tendency to integrate objects in the category "first-person shooter" that were never or rarely designated in such terms to begin with. The paper has been organized with these gameplay elements in mind: each section starts with one of these contemporary associations with "first-person / first-person shooter", and then goes on to explore how similar objects were presented in discourse throughout the history of the medium. In doing so, we will review the advent of perspective in video game graphics, z axis scrolling in action games, active exploration of 3D game spaces, and the ambivalence towards simple "shooting" mechanics at the time id Software games were introduced.

[2] This includes the wikipedia entry, Mobygames' listing of first-person games, games mentioned in academic sources, as well as numerous « top FPS » listings from magazines and the internet. The author would like to thank Hugo Montembault, who conducted a lot of the research on the "top games" in the context of the LUDOV project on video game genres (www.ludov.ca)

Monocular perspective reinvented

In his account of Interactive movies, Bernard Perron refers to the shooting galleries produced by American Laser games as "first-person shooters" (2008:129). The keyword "1st-person" also appears in the field "perspective" for the majority of games associated with the shooting gallery formula on the popular web database Mobygames. Wolf even suggests that we could consider any "shooting galleries on carnival fairground" as the very first first-person shooter games (2012b:26). This is a prime example of the contemporary fascination with the term. Coin-operated mechanical shooting galleries have existed long before the advent of video games; there are known examples of such machines dating as far back as 1895 (*Automatic shooting range*, by Mechanical Trading Co.) and electromechanical shooting games flooded the arcades after the success of *Shoot the Bear* (Seaburg, 1947): *Safari Gun* (Williams, 1954), *Shooting Gallery* (Exhibit Supply, 1954), *Periscope* (Sega, 1968) are just a few noteworthy examples. Needless to say, shooting galleries also predate the development of coin-operated entertainment. In a sense, these play scenarios occur in "first-person", but one would be hard-pressed to find a description of the experience in those terms outside of contemporary literature (as in Wolf, 2012b:31). Since the experience of *Wild Gunman* (Nintendo, 1974) or *Operation Wolf* (Taito, 1987) is a direct continuation of a practice that involved the body – and the eyesight – in a way that is very similar to the actual experience of shooting, defined by the same basic skills of aligning a reticule with a target and timing the trigger and reload actions (Wolf 2012a:569), it appears that the "first-person" nature of this experience was too implicit to be distinguished through language.

Mark J.P. Wolf's presentation of adventure games in the *Video Game Explosion* relates the transition from text to graphical adventure in the early 1980s. According to Wolf, the depictions of settings in *Mystery House* (On-Line Systems, 1980) and other early examples "did introduce a first-person perspective into the games, which helped to engage the player more and compensate for the lack of a graphical user interface" (2008:83). Again, this association is corroborated on the Mobygames page for the game; "first-person" is noted for many graphical adventure games in which the scenes are drawn with the basic rules of perspective. The full screen drawings in *The Hobbit* (Beam Software, 1982) or *Déjà Vu: A Nightmare Comes True* (ICOM, 1985) were easy to distinguish from the typical look of games made from 2D tile sets, which was either perfectly flat or included contradictory viewpoints. However, no mention of "first-person" could be found in the original packaging for these games. Annie

Katz's 1989 article on the "The Adventure Revolution" does mention the first-person perspective as contributing to the excitement of *Déjà Vu* (1989:81), but this occurrence appears to be exceptional. Adventure international's graphical adaptations of their original text adventures typically put forward the ever convenient "hi-res" technological marker, one of the most pervasive marketing tools in video game history. Following their initial series of "Hi-res adventures", Sierra On-Line used "3-D animated adventure" frequently in the marketing of their games, for instance in the 1987 edition of *King's Quest* and *Police Quest*.

Early games in the RPG genre – often called "adventure" at the time – are also associated with the emergence of the first-person point of view in gaming. The dungeon scenes in *Akalabeth* (Garriott, 1980) and *Ultima* (1981) follow the basic composition rules of perspective and mimic natural perception more closely than the typical drawings of early graphical adventure games. The arrays of simple oblique lines and "view by view" spatial exploration are reminiscent of Coley's mainframe game *Maze War* (1974), a common starting point in first-person shooter lists. This design choice had a lot of influence on computer RPGs over the next 20 years, with long lasting series such as *Wizardry* (Sir Tech, 1981-2001), *The Bard's Tale* (Interplay Productions, 1985-1988), *Might & Magic* (New World Computing, 1986-2002) *Ishar* (Silmarils, 1990-1994) and *Eye of the Beholder* (Westwood, 1991-1995). Although all these are often referred to as "first-person" experiences in contemporary literature and databases, they were not described as such on the boxes and in printed ads throughout the 1980s. Through the Ziploc bag, *Akalabeth*'s original cover piece brags about its "perfect perspective" (fig. 1), but the preferred expression for most of the dungeon crawler genre was "3-D", as one can see on the back covers of the first games in the *Wizardry* and *Might & Magic* series (New World Computing, 1986). "3-D scrolling" was also common (*The Bard's Tale*, 1985; *Legacy of the Ancients*, Quest Soft, 1987), even though the progression through space was not very smooth and rather elliptical when compared to vertical or horizontal scrolling games. The follow-up to *Legacy of the Ancients*, The *Legend of Blacksilver* (Quest Soft, 1988), boasts "Incredibly realistic first person views and 3-D effects" on its back cover. Some catalogue ads for *Might & Magic III* (New World Computing, 1991) also mention the first-person perspective (*PC Games*, September/October 1991:37).

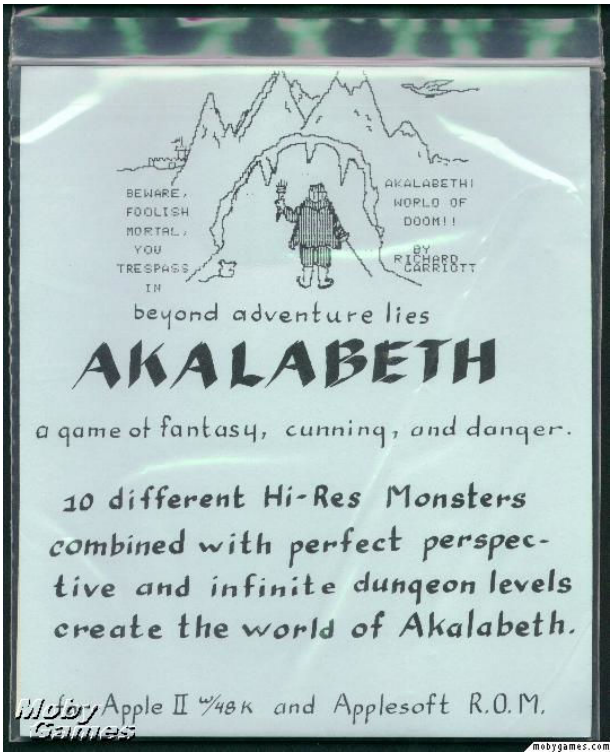
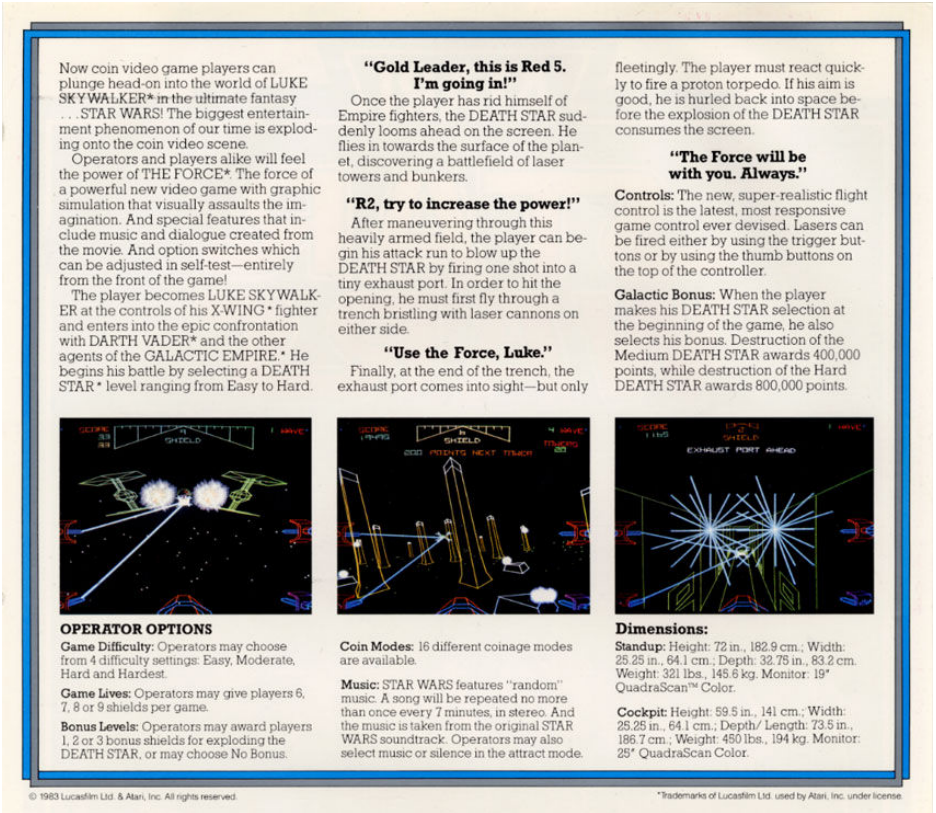


Figure 1. Perfect perspective (*Akalabeth*, Richard Garriott, 1979). Source: www.mobygames.com

Exploring the deep

The idea of smooth scrolling on a represented depth axis brings us closer to the active visual exploration of a 3-D space associated with the first-person shooter genre. Video game engineers have come up with many techniques to implement this kind of visual illusion a long time before the elliptical "view by view" exploration of early RPGs. In 1976, Atari's *Night Driver* used a dynamic array of white squares to simulate driving on a sinuous road from the perspective of the driver. Arcade owners were told in the flyer that the machine "places the driver in the cockpit of his own Sebring type racer". Years later, the popular *Pole Position* (Namco, 1982) still used a "presence through perspective" rhetoric to sell the game; "computerized image in perspective gives the player the feeling he is there, at the race track". Similarly, the manual for the adaptation of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* on the Vectrex (1982) explains how the joystick "moves your ship through space from the pilot's view". *Star Wars* (Atari, 1983) goes one step further and associates the experience of its dynamic perspective vector display to a form

of identification with a popular character: “The player becomes LUKE SKYWALKER at the controls of his X-WING fighter” (fig. 2). Racing or flying games from the electromechanical era such as Sega’s *Jet Rocket* (1970), which already integrated steering wheels or yokes, held similar claims without necessarily presenting the action from the pilot’s point of view. *Night Driver* was likely inspired by a similar German game, *Nürburgring1*, designed by Reiner Foerst (1976); the original flyer points out the “naturgetreuem perspektivischen” of the game, which translates to “lifelike perspective”. But here again, the typical “pilot” game used “3-D” as a marker of technological attraction (*Starhawk*, Cinematronics, 1977; *Speed Freak*, Vectorbeam, 1979). Descriptive text in flyers often took the time to highlight the depth effects: in Taito’s Interceptor (1976), “Enemy aircraft increase and decrease in size”; In *Starhawk,* “ships move in all direction”.



Now coin video game players can plunge head-on into the world of LUKE SKYWALKER* in the ultimate fantasy . . . STAR WARS! The biggest entertainment phenomenon of our time is exploding onto the coin video scene.

Operators and players alike will feel the power of THE FORCE*. The force of a powerful new video game with graphic simulation that visually assaults the imagination. And special features that include music and dialogue created from the movie. And option switches which can be adjusted in self-test—entirely from the front of the game!

The player becomes LUKE SKYWALKER at the controls of his X-WING * fighter and enters into the epic confrontation with DARTH VADER* and the other agents of the GALACTIC EMPIRE.* He begins his battle by selecting a DEATH STAR * level ranging from Easy to Hard.

“Gold Leader, this is Red 5. I’m going in!”

Once the player has rid himself of Empire fighters, the DEATH STAR suddenly looms ahead on the screen. He flies in towards the surface of the planet, discovering a battlefield of laser towers and bunkers.

“R2, try to increase the power!”

After maneuvering through this heavily armed field, the player can begin his attack run to blow up the DEATH STAR by firing one shot into a tiny exhaust port. In order to hit the opening, he must first fly through a trench bristling with laser cannons on either side.

“Use the Force, Luke.”

Finally, at the end of the trench, the exhaust port comes into sight—but only fleetingly. The player must react quickly to fire a proton torpedo. If his aim is good, he is hurled back into space before the explosion of the DEATH STAR consumes the screen.

“The Force will be with you. Always.”

Controls: The new, super-realistic flight control is the latest, most responsive game control ever devised. Lasers can be fired either by using the trigger buttons or by using the thumb buttons on the top of the controller.

Galactic Bonus: When the player makes his DEATH STAR selection at the beginning of the game, he also selects his bonus. Destruction of the Medium DEATH STAR awards 400,000 points, while destruction of the Hard DEATH STAR awards 800,000 points.

OPERATOR OPTIONS

Game Difficulty: Operators may choose from 4 difficulty settings: Easy, Moderate, Hard and Hardest.

Game Lives: Operators may give players 6, 7, 8 or 9 shields per game.

Bonus Levels: Operators may award players 1, 2 or 3 bonus shields for exploding the DEATH STAR, or may choose No Bonus.

Coin Modes: 16 different coinage modes are available.

Music: STAR WARS features “random” music. A song will be repeated no more than once every 7 minutes, in stereo. And the music is taken from the original STAR WARS soundtrack. Operators may also select music or silence in the attract mode.

Dimensions:

Standup: Height: 72 in., 182.9 cm.; Width: 25.25 in., 64.1 cm.; Depth: 32.75 in., 83.2 cm. Weight: 321 lbs., 145.6 kg. Monitor: 19” QuadraScan™ Color.

Cockpit: Height: 59.5 in., 141 cm.; Width: 25.25 in., 64.1 cm.; Depth/ Length: 73.5 in., 186.7 cm.; Weight: 450 lbs., 194 kg. Monitor: 25” QuadraScan Color.

Figure 2. The player becomes Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*, Atari, 1983).
Source: http://flyers.arcade-museum.com/

Along with racing games, where spatial exploration is “naturally” restricted through roads and tracks, most of the games mentioned in this section fall under the “rail shooter” category. This generic tag has been used more systematically with the advent of 3-D shooting games where spatial exploration

was automatically handled by the system; the action of *Panzer Dragoon* (Sega, 1995) or *Time Crysis* (Namco, 1995) unfolds through space as if it was set up on the rails of a roller coaster. Interestingly, the expression doesn't seem to have been used when shooting games were mostly conducted on the "technological rails" of vertical or horizontal scrolling; just like "first-person" for shooting galleries, the expression "on rails" was apparently too implicit to be expressed formally before the standardisation of virtual worlds created with 3-D calculations, and its corollary affordances in terms of spatial exploration.

The visual effect of travelling on the depth axis – created with an array of simple blocks, a vanishing point simulated with color layers or grids, vector displays or interpolated bitmaps – has been associated sporadically with the expression "first-person" in video game magazines, even for racing games and shooters that correspond more specifically to what is called "third person" in contemporary taxonomies. In his EGM cover story "Next Generation Gaming" on the upcoming consoles from Sega, NEC and Nintendo in July 1989, Steve Harris describes *Victory Run* for the Turbografx-16 (Hudson, 1987) and *Super Thunderblade* (Sega, 1988) for the Genesis as "first-person", even though one can clearly see the car and chopper on the screenshots included in the article (1989: 35, 37). The same confusion appears to be frequent throughout these transitional years. For instance, in the March 1993 issue of Gamepro magazine, the reviewer for the racing game *Outlander* (Mindscape, 1992) describes its "behind the car view" as first-person (1993:128), while the reviewer for the Sega CD version of *Jaguar XJ220* (JVC, 1993) uses the more accurate expression a few pages later (1993:154). The confusion also occurs in contemporary academic literature and video game press. For instance, *Hitman* (IO Interactive, 2000) has been called a "3-D first person stealth game" (Konzack, 2008:208), and many "best first-person shooters" lists include third-person shooters (Meer, 2012) such as the *Max Payne* series (Remedy).

Any which way

The active exploration of a 3-D space has been implemented in game mechanics a long time before the commercial explosion of the first-person shooter genre at the beginning of the 1990s. The arcade flyer for *Battlezone* does mention the first-person perspective, but the expression has not been used for games allowing 3-D spatial exploration consistently over the following decade. Buzzwords such as "3-D" and "smooth scrolling" were at least as preeminent. Many games have followed in *Battlezone*'s

tank tracks; the vehicle simulation genre has been especially lucrative in the domestic computer market. The printed ads and packaging of *Stellar 7* (Damon Slye, 1983) or *Sherman M4* (Loriciel, 1989) put forth their outstanding 3-D graphics, made with wireframe and polygonal 3-D respectively. In 1984, Lucasfilm's *Rescue on Fractalus* proposed a "3-D flight fantasy" where gamers had to rescue fellow pilots at the command of their spacecraft. The box for the Epyx release of the game on Commodore 64 and Atari 400/800 lists the "First-person perspective in both flying and rescue sequences" as a feature, and the spiritual successor *Koronis Rift* (Lucasfilm, 1985) is defined as a "First person strategy and adventure". Starting with *Space Station Oblivion* (1987), Incentive Software has proposed a series of science fiction vehicular game all based on the polygonal Freescape engine. The back of the box highlights that the "revolutionary 3-D scaling and perspectives that change smoothly as you move around will give you the uncanny feeling that 'you are there'", and the sequel (*Dark Side*, 1988) adds "first-person" to a similar lengthy description. Incentive released a version of their Freescape modelling engine to the public (Virtual Reality Studio) in 1991.

Free exploration games have emerged outside of the *Battlezone* clone enclave relatively early. Paul Allen Edelstein's *Wayout* (Sirius, 1982) proposed a very capable 3-D engine for the Atari 400/800 and Commodore 64 computers; the mazes of flat blue walls were rotated fluidly in response to user input, in front of a colorful background. The screen layout, with the perspective view on top of a overhead map, is clearly inspired by Colley's *Maze War*. The packaging features a clownesque figure on the cover, and the included "wayout costume glasses and compass" made the human nature of the "vehicle" even more obvious (fig. 3). The visual design of *Alternate Reality: The City* (Paradise programming, 1985), an original RPG mixing fantasy and science-fiction elements, is reminiscent of Edelstein's game: walls are moving smoothly in front of a colorful gradient background. Although the engine is a great achievement of the "smooth scrolling" feature boasted by the likes of *The Bard's Tale*, it is bitmap-based and thus movement is also restricted. Even if these examples let go of the vehicular setting in favor of a "on foot" adventure, neither games or their respective sequels are described with the expression "first-person". Again, "3-D" was the preferred marketing option.

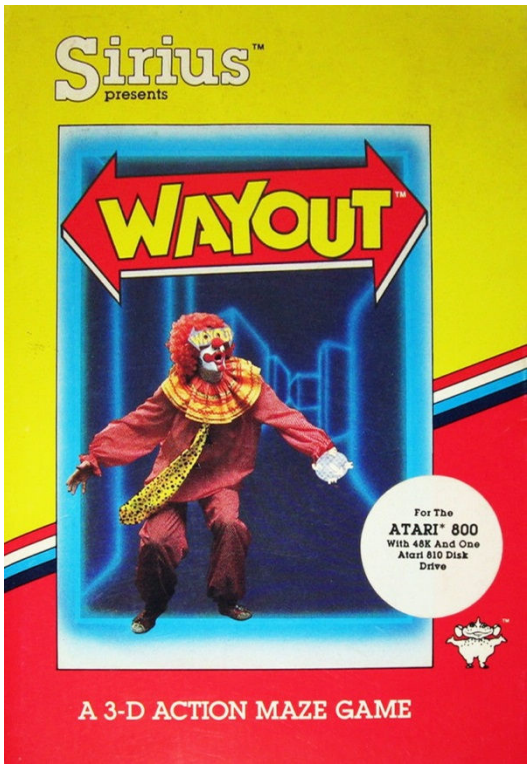


Figure 3. First person clown (*Wayout*, Sirius, 1982)

Hovertank 3D (1991) is considered id's first "testing ground for technology and concepts" (Loguindice & Barton, 2012: 56) that lead to *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) and *Doom*. The genre was thus a direct continuation of the trend set forth by *Battlezone*. The original control scheme of the id shooters make this observation even more obvious: the four arrow keys allowed the player to move forward / backward and to rotate the point of view. This layout is known in gamer culture as "tank controls". In a very real sense, the visual exploration afforded to the player in these games occurred as the rotation of a vehicle.

Being there

As we have seen throughout the previous sections, "3-D" appears to be the most pervasive textual element in our network; most of the games under scrutiny have been discussed / sold with this concept of a three dimensional experience. This cultural pervasiveness is echoed in the very titles of id Software games such as *Catacomb 3-D* (1991) and *Wolfenstein 3D.* However, the marketing of these games makes it obvious that another buzzword was spreading rapidly at the beginning of the 1990s.

Wolfenstein 3D was described as "smooth scrolling virtual reality, as you move through a sensationally realistic 3-D world of amazing detail" (fig. 4). Doom was also presented as a virtual reality experience (Loguidice & Barton, 2009:58). The buzzword was everywhere in the early 1990s; *Battlezone* (Atari, 1980) was even retrospectively called "Virtual Reality for a quarter" by Wired magazine, a statement echoed by the information pedestal for the game in the *Videotopia* travelling exhibition (1996). To this day, the first-person shooter is the video game genre most commonly associated with VR.

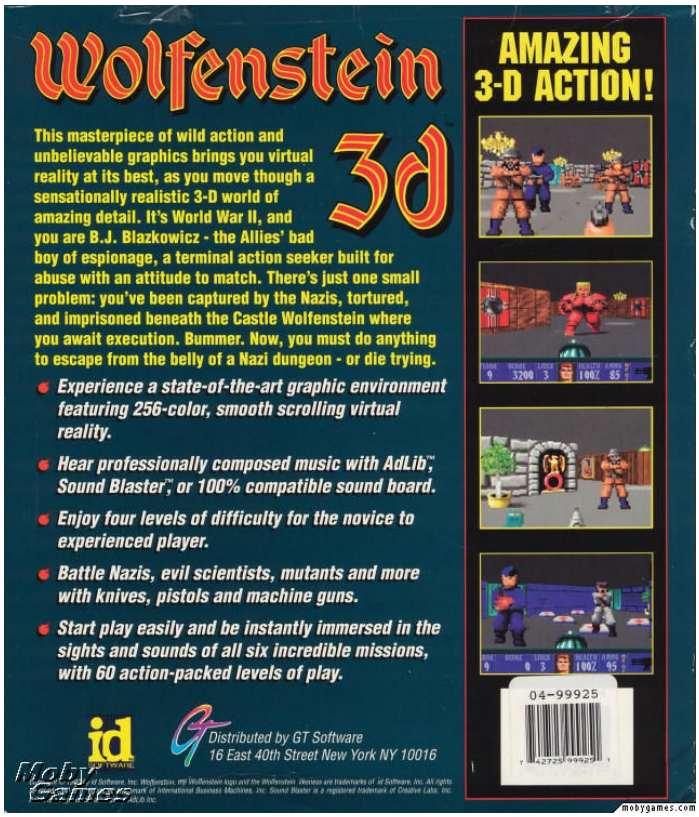


Figure 4. VR marketing (*Wolfenstein 3-D*, id Software, 1992).
Source: www.mobygames.com

One of the defining features associated with virtual reality is the adaptability of the illusion to the user's input. In 1968, Ivan Sutherland described the first major head-mounted display system at the AFIPS Fall Joint Computer Science conference. The Sword of Damocles device was able to detect the position of the user's head, and adjust the wireframe display of a 3-D world accordingly. Yet in the corresponding paper, the expression "first-person" is nowhere to be found (Sutherland, 1968). Rather, the engineer discusses the technological underpinnings of the "dynamic perspective display" (1968:759)

that allows the image to move according to the user's point of view. In 1991, Howard Rheingold presented Morton Heilig's Sensorama as one of the first VR experiments. The device was designed in the early 1960s but never released for the general public. It sought to provide a multimodal illusion of a ride in the streets of New York City: the device included stereo moving images and sound, along with a vibrating seat, handlebars, sensations of wind and a variety of aromas. In the patent documentation, Heilig doesn't use the expression "first-person", but makes it clear that the object of the invention is "to provide an apparatus for simulating an actual, predetermined experience in the senses of an individual" (1962:1).

Sensorama actively combined many previous oddball experiments that sought to add sensory information to the standard movie-going experience, such as Percepto and Smell-O-Vision[3]. Even without these added thrills, cinema had been described as very lifelike and engaging thanks to its visually rich stimuli from the earliest reports in the press (see Burch, 1991; Gauthier, 2009). In classic cinema theory, the medium is defined to a great extent through this paradoxical presence effect (entities are visually present yet fundamentally absent). Christian Metz theorized the engagement of movie-goers with this paradoxical illusion through the concept of "primary identification" (1977), an expression which echoes "first-person" semantically. From a pragmatic perspective, "point of view shot" ("vue subjective" in French) became customary in movie-making language along with the development of pluriponctual movies; the multiplication of different shots in a single movie made it necessary to segment filmic creation with more specific terms. The expression doesn't refer to just any shot displaying anthropomorphic qualities, but more specifically to images understood to be seen through the eyes of a character in the fictional world. Overall, it appears that expressions that are equivalent with "first-person" were more current in the world of cinema than in the world in video games until the mid-1990s.

[3] Percepto is a simple "electric chair" system providing light shocks at key points during the projection of William Castle's *The Tingler* (1959). Similarly, Smell-O-Vision added olfactory information during *Scent of Mystery* (1960). Mike Todd Jr., who acted as a producer for this movie, also worked with his father of the original feature film demonstrating the Cinerama system (a three projector system meant to completely take over the spectator's field of vision) in 1952. For more on the Cinerama and many other similar experiments in art history, see Grau (2003).

More than guns

As we have seen throughout the previous sections, many games that are described as "first-person" in contemporary sources were not referred to as such at the time of their release. Similarly, many of the objects associated with the "first-person shooter" generic tag nowadays were not initially described as "shooters". It is undeniable: the commercial explosion of the first person shooter genre came with the release of id Software games at the beginning of the 1990s. It came as a surprise to find out, in the course of this research, that the company's marketing efforts used just about every term in our textual network *except* "first-person shooter". Considering that the expression did surface before the release of these games, the omission is even more striking.

At this stage of scholarly research, it is very risky to declare with absolute certainty when "first-person shooter" was used for the first time in gaming culture. As Steven L. Kent reports (2001:163), a design aid document circulating at Atari in 1979 listed "first person *Space Invaders*" among other game pitches; this is the idea that inspired Dave Theurer to create *Tempest* (1980). It is one of the earliest uses of an expression that can be directly equated with "first-person shooter" (even though the game corresponds to a third person shooter, by contemporary standards). In 1980, the *Battlezone* flyer described the "totally new" experience as "first person combat". Considering the popularity of shooting games even before *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978), the choice of "combat" is surprising. Shooting mechanics were already so common that Atari engineers conceived the graphic architecture of the VCS console around "player-missile graphics". Sega's *Space Tactics* (1980) and Nintendo's *Radar Scope* (1979) clearly copied the formula that inspired *Tempest*, boasting "real-life 3-D" and "perspective effect" respectively.

Figure 5. Totally new first person combat (*Battlezone*, Atari, 1980). Source: http://flyers.arcade-museum.com/

While vertical and horizontal shoot'em ups, or "slide and shoot" games as they were described in the *Videotopia* exhibition, remained a major genre throughout the 1980s, many prominent games in these years integrated shooting action along a variety of other mechanics in strikingly hybrid scenarios. *Koronis Rift* was described as a "First person strategy and adventure"; it involved investigating shipwrecks and collecting items alongside the crosshair shooting action. *Space Station Oblivion* asked the player to position a drill in each level and to neutralize the deadly security systems through the activation of mechanisms in the environment. This diversity of action is also present in early id games. It might explain the company's reluctance to market these games with the term shooter, favoring expressions such as "amazing 3-D action!" (*Wolfenstein 3D*) and "first-person adventure" (*Doom*). The

PC Gamer quote on the *Quake* box (1995) speaks of an "atmospheric 3-D action game". Many landmark games in the genre used "3-D" instead of "first-person" (*Descent*, Parallax Software, 1994; *Duke Nukem 3D*, 3D Realms, 1996); in Gamespot's review, the latter is referred to as a "3D shoot'em up". Most of these games integrate navigation, activation of mechanisms in the environment, and minimal equipment handling through the plurality of guns. The shooting mechanics, however, take center stage in the experience, and the packaging and ads often insist on the firepower and deadly weapons. This might explain why the press and community at large started referring to them systematically as "first-person shooters".

In 1995, *Terminator: Future Shock* (Bethesda) was one of the first games to integrate the "mouse look" visual exploration now standard in most first-person games. While Tal Belvins underscores the "hulking mass of first person shooters" in the 1996 Gamespot review of the game, the categorization used by French magazine Joystick speaks volumes: when it comes to genre, the game is simply labelled "Doom/Aventure" (February 1996:95). A recent lexical analysis of chat sessions on Usenet confirms the slow adoption of the expression in gaming culture: "first-person shooter" replaced "Doom-clone" only in the second half of the 1990s (http://doom.wikia.com/wiki/Doom_clones). This process appears to have been very gradual. The widespread adoption of the expression in video game press and marketing occurred as the genre proliferated in the 1990s. It is thus a direct consequence of the genre's popularity; the proliferation of similar experiences made "first-person shooter" a convenient generic tag for communication and marketing in gaming culture, and concurrently, other experiences with similar visual design became more likely to be described as "first-person".

Now that we have exposed the basic results of our etymological research in connection with specific game configurations, we will try to explain some of the most surprising aspects of the findings.

A different point of view

Considering the associations with VR, and the interactive nature of the medium, one of the biggest surprises comes with a somewhat trivial realization: in the majority of accounts and databases mentioned in this paper, "first-person" is associated with the visual configuration of games, often directly with the concurrent expressions "perspective" and "point of view". The bias for visual

configurations in our textual network is certainly indicative of an overall visuocentrism in media practices. These observations can be related to the paradoxical remediation position of video games: while the medium proposes more immediacy than previous audiovisual media thanks to interactivity, the visual aspect of games when it comes to surface realism has been trailing, and is still one of the main aspects to benefit from technological evolution. In a very real sense, video games are still apprehended and formatted with a cinematic mindset through language.

Building from our textual network, "smooth 3D free exploration action game" would have been more representative of the gameplay configuration that became wildly popular following the release of id games. Outside of the network, one might wonder why the expression "first-hand experience" never surfaced in gaming vernacular, especially considering the popularity of mimetic interfaces such as gun and steering wheels.[4] This "hands-on" control for vehicular games and the proximity of the basic game controllers with vehicular interfaces might explain the apparent paradox we noted: while *Thunderblade* or *Victory Run* correspond to what we call "third-person" games nowadays, they occur in "first-person" when we focus on the hands instead of the view.

As we have seen throughout this paper, usage of the expressions "first-person / first-person shooter" occurs retrospectively on many objects that were not referred to in the exact same terms, while related (and more encompassing) expressions such as "3-D" were more prevalent up to the commonly noted "birth" of the first-person shooter genre in the early 1990s. We don't have the time to explore thoroughly the consequences of this revisionist attitude. However, we want to highlight a historiographical paradox that is potentially damaging. In most popular historical accounts and in many scholarly efforts, games such as *Catacomb 3-D* and *Wolfenstein 3D* released by id Software at the beginning of the 1990s are strongly associated with the "birth" of the genre (Bryce & Rutter, 2002:67; Kline *et al.*, 2003:84; Rehak, 2008:193; Loguidice & Barton, 2009:51; Voorhees *et al.*, 2012:2). *Doom* is also a common starting point or highlight – it is the stated focus of a chapter in both *Ultimate History* (Kent, 2001) and *Vintage Games* (Loguidice & Barton, 2009). Previous efforts that fit the genre's criteria are often discussed as precursors. But if id Software games were not described with the expression "first-person shooter", and that many prior games held similar gameplay configurations, how are we

[4] In the context of a typology of interface mappings between actual and represented actions, VR apparatus are often called « symbiotic interfaces ». In the case where a specific technology is mimicked to limit the scope of interaction more naturally, the mapping could be said to be "symbiotechnologic". See Therrien, 2014.

justified, as historians, to give these games such significance in history? Is "commercial success" the necessary bias for academics who seek to build a cultural history of video games? Why would it be necessary to echo such industrial criteria in the very way we format/segment video game history?

In Anne Friedberg's major contribution *The Virtual Window* (2006), the author presents a striking historical overview of our relationship with framed images. Friedberg is very sensitive to the textual manifestations of concepts such as "perspective" in history, and presents numerous conceptual "lenses" from philosophers that help us see how the world of media has been "framed" for our understanding. In her account of perspective in Alberti's writings, she notes that historical *doxa* until very recently insisted on a clear "shift" in favor of this technique during the Renaissance; other pictorial strategies such as polyscenic paintings were seen as a residual mistake, "a carry-over from earlier systems of representation" (2006:36). Following Lew Andrews, Friedberg points out that these paintings might in fact have been more prominent after the introduction of linear perspective.

Obviously, a parallel can be drawn with the current tendency to create clear periods and "shifts" in video game history. Throughout this paper, it is easy to see that the "birth of the first-person shooter" scenario presented in the New York Times feature and spreading in literature leads to a tendency to iron out any element that contradicts the narrative, while the contemporary fascination with the genre leads to historical distortion, giving importance to previous objects – very specific aspects of these objects – that were not directly part of the lineage. While the "lens" of critical etymology that we have put forward in this paper doesn't have the same ambitions as those put forth by Friedberg, it appears to be an essential tool to "defuse" the glorifying discourse that so commonly surface in business journalism and interviews. Hopefully, the emergence of this type of research can have a positive impact on the tendency to "buy into" rhetorical strategies that were engineered, for the most part, as a glorification tool by video game corporations.

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