Finding words for how video games move us

Interpreting games as motion systems in Erin Manning's process ontology terms

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Abstract

In this research master thesis, I attempt to further game literacy, by looking to established vocabularies from other fields of study. Specifically, I transpose outside terms for describing movement systems in specialized detail, to interpretations of video games. This adds to extant game studies works that look at physical and conceptual spatial properties of games. Such works see players interpreting games spatially, through meaningfully organized systems of movement. I chose to add to these works on the kinetic aspect of games, with my own provisional and experimental transposition of terms taken from Erin Manning's philosophical and cultural studies efforts. Manning develops numerous concepts for describing motion of all kinds, especially so for her interpretations of dance. She does this with a so-called process ontological intent, which is to philosophically frame and describe all reality as interrelated, across all scales, and also to describe all things as adaptive and moving, each in a meaningfully distinct way. Manning develops concepts mainly through interpreting cultural artifacts, akin to my intent for this thesis. For this experiment, I transpose eight terms developed in Manning's interpretations of dance, to an extensive case study of the popular video game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Those eight terms of Manning deal most concretely with different aspects of motion, at different levels of scale and complexity. Other theorists with interpretive concepts for motion systems, for dance specifically, seemed less immediately applicable, comprehensive, or viable for this present thesis. In eight paragraphs, I test the viability of eight of Manning's concepts, with relevant supplementary concepts explored in each paragraph. Broadly, this leads me to describe how players are meaningfully moved to act in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, and games more broadly. I also get at how this is meaningfully framed as involving larger moving systems in such games. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is a game in which most all elements are overtly dynamic, adaptive, and interrelated. I therefore chose it as a case study to extensively try Manning's concepts on. Other video games provide counterexamples in each paragraph, to each interpretive use of one of Manning's terms.

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1.-.-. Theoretical frame and methodology

1.1.-. Premise and general thesis outline

1.1.1. Introducing the thesis premise

This research master thesis builds on two earlier thesis projects of mine. Both of these tried to find new concepts, with which to interpret meaningful aspects and elements of games, that the game studies field currently seems to have a strained vocabulary for. In those projects, as in this one, I experimentally transpose terms from studies of other media, to a study of video games.

1.1.2. Preceding thesis projects

In this way, one prior thesis explores the meaningful use in video games, of motion picture screening, picture display rate, editing, and other elements readily recognized and named, with established interpretive language from film studies.[1] That thesis showed how video games often afford meaningfully limited control over such digitally simulated film properties. This is hard to name with just game studies concepts. In games, a sequence of events often derives equal meaning from what can happen and what does happen.[2] Properties derived from film in video games often appear adapted to suit this.

The aforementioned bachelor thesis examines properties of architecture as they appear in video games.[3] Being a spatial medium, comprising arrangements of solid volumes and empty spaces, architecture meaningfully conveys ranges of afforded and constrained movement. In video games, computer simulations of navigable architecture often convey the same. Simulated walls or rolling plains might do this literally, so that a range of possible actions can be easily described in architectural terms. Some architectural displays in games contradict or obscure the actual possibility space, though. What can be done in these games has to mentally modelled abstractly, divorced from what the game shows.[4] That thesis showed how an architectural language is still viable for this.

1.1.3. Establishing a main research question

This present research master thesis adds to these prior projects, with a search for specialized terms to interpret the kinetic aspect of games with. The kinetic aspect of games conveys meaning by how a player moves around these spatial forms of constraint and affordance, and how other actors in a game move around in relation to that. The medium of dance is often taken as most associated with meaningful movement. While I therefore started this project by extensively looking at works of dance theory, the

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[1] Ottens, M.W.J.K. (2015) *Film in Computer Games*; Nijmegen: Radboud University: 2-3.
[2] Ottens, M.W.J.K. (2015) *Film in Computer Games*; Nijmegen: Radboud University: 95-97.
[3] Ottens, M.W.J.K. (2015) *Architecture in Video Games*; Nijmegen: Radboud University: 4-5, 13-15, 32-33.
[4] Ottens, M.W.J.K. (2015) *Architecture in Video Games*; Nijmegen: Radboud University: 5-8, 23, 43.

philosophical and cultural studies works of Erin Manning, when they relate to dance, seemed a more easily transposed and comprehensive addition to established game studies vocabulary. From prior projects, and from an extensive preliminary analysis of the game studies field, many theorists were found noting how meaningful the movement systems in games appear to be. Most mention dance as exemplary of this kind of meaningful movement. From what I could find, though, none follow up on this in much detail. This thesis is my provisional attempt to do so. It aims to add to game studies, with interpretive language specialized in describing systems of meaningful motion. Much of the following, then, is derived from this central question:

How might Erin Manning's conceptions of meaningful movements in dance provide for describing the kinetic aspect of games?

1.1.4. Theory and methodology chapter outline

This starting chapter of my thesis describes and explains a theoretical frame and methodology, by which I hope to indicate how Erin Manning's process philosophical and cultural studies terminology can meaningfully inform video game interpretations. In the following paragraph, then, I briefly describe my intent to further game studies discourse, with concepts established outside of that field. I also take note of how game studies already often mentions, but rarely follows up on, the meaningful motion systems in games. In the third paragraph of this introductory chapter, I briefly contextualize my transmedial approach, of using interpretive terms for other media, to interpret games. In the fourth paragraph, I explain my choice to explore Erin Manning's work for this, from out of a preliminary overview of theorists that develop concepts for motion, especially in dance. This paragraph also explains my selection of specific concepts from her writing. In the fifth paragraph, I briefly describe my selection criteria for video game case studies on which to test the concepts I transpose, and the methodology used for this.

1.2.-. An interdisciplinary approach to the kinetic aspect of games

1.2.1. Current calls for interdisciplinary game studies

Media literacy scholars like Elliot Gaines, Michael Hoechsmann, or Stuart Poyntz often call for a popular terminology, with which a culture might exchange interpretations of media artifacts.[5] Game studies attempts to develop an interpretive language for games often prove too specialized, or too formally divorced from what games themselves express, to become popular or viable in this way, outside of the academic field. Popular media scholar Ian Bogost observes this in his review of formative game studies discourse over the years.[6] Specialization helped establish and consolidate the field of game studies, Bogost states, but a more interdisciplinary approach might now be needed, given the current precarity of humanities research, to vitalize and bolster the field, and to better integrate it into a wider media studies discourse.[7]

Taking up a transmedia approach, describing games with language developed for interpreting other media, is my heeding Bogost's proposition. I intend to open game studies vocabulary up, to draw on a wider media discourse. Moreover, premised on the notion of remediation, I assume that established and popularly familiar media can inform interpretations of new and unfamiliar media. This might lead me to interpretive terms with traction in popular media literacy.

1.2.2. Other attempts to study games as meaningful movement systems

Many a game studies text already implies the need for looking at games as meaningful movement systems. This already implies a need to look at established interpretive languages for media such as dance, or to the more easily transposed and broader kinds of interpretive languages, coming from philosophical projects like Erin Manning 's. In *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*, and in the edited collection *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism - The Next Level*, the game scholar Steffen Walz overtly takes note of this meaningful spatiality in games, which is interpreted by moving through it, and seeing other things move in response.[8] Walz also provides a long list of theorists conceiving of games like this, most using specialized terms of their own.

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[5] Gaines, E. (2010) *Media Literacy and Semiotics*; New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 11-22., Hoechsmann, M., Poyntz, S.R. (2012) *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction*; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: 1-2.
[6] Bogost, I. (2015, Feb. 02) 'Philistinism', 'Fundamentalism', in: Ian Bogost, Writing, Game Studies, Year Fifteen - Notes on Thoughts on Formalism, http://bogost.com/writing/blog/game-studies-year-fifteen/ (2018, Jun. 11).
[7] Bogost, I. (2015, Feb. 02) 'Philistinism', 'Fundamentalism', in: Ian Bogost, Writing, Game Studies, Year Fifteen - Notes on Thoughts on Formalism, http://bogost.com/writing/blog/game-studies-year-fifteen/ (2018, Jun. 11).
[8] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press., Von Borries, F., Böttger, M., Walz, S.P. (2007) 'Introduction', in: *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism - The Next Level*; Von Borries, F., Böttger, M., Walz, S.P. (eds.); Krumminga, J., Pepper, I., Roascio, F. (trs.); Boston: Birkhäuser Verlag: 11-13.

The architect Mark Wigley describes games as insular spaces with meaningful arrays of paths and barriers, to playfully explore and experiment with.[9] To Ian Bogost, games are spatiotemporally navigable expressive systems. Bogost derives this idea from Katie Salen's and Eric Zimmerman's oft reiterated definition of the medium.[10] Walz also lists Janet Murray's influential notion that games, as systems of rules, describe their current and changing states along strict procedures.[11] These procedures are negotiated by a player in an exploratory manner. To Espen Aarseth, games can be seen as narrative texts, but with simultaneities and multiplicities complementing event sequences more conventionally linear.[12] Such a narrative space has to be explored to be understood. Gonzalo Frasca's otherwise radically different understanding of games is also defined by meanings emergent from interpretive play behavior. [13] A game obfuscates outcomes and alternative approaches to situations, so that events seem to emerge meaningfully from a player's moving and gesturing. Even foundational texts by the likes of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois define games as imagined play spaces, navigated playfully.[14] Both of these scholars, as influenced by Frederik Jacobus Johannes Buytendijk and Kurt Lewin, even mention dance as a viable example of how motion in games can be seen as meaningful.[15]

Walz' stated intent with his own overview is to derive a theoretical understanding of games as architectural forms.[16] With this present thesis, however, I aim to supplement the repeated mentions in all these game studies efforts, of meaningful systems of movement in games. I experimentally transpose

[9] Wigley, M. (2007) 'Gamespace', in: *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism - The Next Level*; Von Borries, F., Böttger, M., Walz, S.P. (eds.); Krumminga, J., Pepper, I., Roascio, F. (trs.); Boston: Birkhäuser Verlag: 484-486.

[10] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 11., Bogost, I. (2008) 'The Rhetoric of Video Games.', in: *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*; Salen, K. (ed.); part of 'The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning'; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 120-123, 125-128., Bogost, I. (2007) *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 2-10, 42-44., Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (2004) *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*; Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 2-7, 73-81.

[11] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 50., Murray, J.H. (1997) *Hamlet on the Holodeck - The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*; New York: The Free Press: 69-83.

[12] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 11., Aarseth, E.J. (1997) *Cybertext - Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*; Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press: 1-3, 17-23.

[13] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 11., Gonzalo, F. (2003) 'Simulation versus Narrative', in: *The Video Game Theory Reader*; Wolf, M.J.P., Perron, B. (eds.); New York: Routledge: 225-233.

[14] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 19, 65., Huizinga, J. (2008) *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 28-55., Caillois, R. (2001) *Man, Play and Games*; Barash, M. (tr.); Illinois: University of Illinois Press: 3-6, 11-36.

[15] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 35-45., Buytendijk, F.J.J. (1932) *Het Spel van Mensch en Dier Als Openbaring van Levensdriften*; Amsterdam: Kosmos: 134-136.

[16] Walz, S.P. (2010) *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*; Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 11., Von Borries, F., Böttger, M., Walz, S.P. (eds.) (2007) *Space Time Play - Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: The Next Level*; Krumminga, J., Pepper, I., Roascio, F. (trs.); Boston: Birkhäuser Verlag: 11-13.

Erin Manning's terms for describing movement, derived from a philosophical and cultural studies approach to certain dance performances.

The closest comparable efforts in game studies, that I could find, are a direct application of dance notation methods to player gestures in selected video games. This was done by Astrid Larssen, Lian Loke, and Toni Robertson.[17] Emma Westecott and Rikke Toft Nørgaard compared games to puppetry in performance art.[18] In studies of digital dance, like those by Todd Cochrane and Isabel de Cavadas Valverde, or by Lisanne Sanders, interactivity and computer interfaces are often regarded as video game like, but not in much detail.[19]

[17] Larssen, A.T., Loke, L., Robertson, T. (2005) 'Labanotation for Design of Movement-Based Interaction', in: *Proceedings of Interactive Entertainment Conference 2005*; Sidney: University of Technology Sidney.
[18] Westecott, E. (2009) 'The Player Character as Performing Object', in: *Proceedings of DiGRA Conference 2009*; Newport: University of Wales., Nørgaard, R.T. (2010) 'Stillborn Gamers? Writing a Birth Certificate for Corporeality and Locomotion in Game Research', in: *Proceedings of Nordic DiGRA Conference 2010*; Aarhus: Aarhus University.
[19] Cochrane, T., Valverde, I.C. (2013) 'Innovative Dance-Technology Educational Practices within *Senses-Places*', in: Proceedings of SLACTIONS Conference 2013; s.l.: Elsevier, Ltd.: 124-125., Sanders, L. (2013) *Digital Dance: Towards Kinestech - Rethinking the Perception of Dance and Digital Technology by Introducing a Dramaturgy of Perceptual Synergy*; Utrecht: Utrecht University: 4, 30.

1.3.-. Transmedia game studies

As stated, I look to further games studies discourse by transposing interpretive terms developed for another medium. I experimentally describe specific video games, in this case with terms conceived of for describing dance. These terms were conceived of by Manning, via interpretations of dance, but with the intent of being applicable to media studies and a philosophy of motion more generally. This gets at a kinetic aspect of games, that is often mentioned in game studies, but rarely described in concrete terms.

My theoretical premise for this transposition is Richard Grusin's and Jay David Bolter's conception of remediation, as developed from Marshall McLuhan's work.[20] Media theorist Marshall McLuhan, in his foundational *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, theorizes that artists allude to familiar media forms, to render messages in newer media more recognizable.[21] Bolter and Grusin call this remediation, and expand the concept to imply how older media always influence our reading and creation of newer media artifacts.[22] Dance, for example, would be a familiar medium to video game creators and their audience, which they might consciously or unconsciously draw on to intelligibly render relative player movements, choreographic rule systems, and other kinetic properties of games. Terms developed to interpret dance, then, might provide a better understanding of games as well. As Bolter and Grusin describe in their specialized terms, familiar properties from other media can also make a new medium seem more attractive, comfortable, or artistically viable, as it is compared to, or creatively contrasted against that older medium.[23] Marie-Laure Ryan, in positing the term transmediality, proposed a more detailed study of remediation, with a practice of transposing distinct interpretive terms to the analysis of different media.[24] For her, this is to further a study of how specific narrative elements can appear recognizably reproduced in differing media forms. For my part, I transpose theoretical terms to see how formal media properties translate from one medium to another. In this case, I hope to find new terms to describe the kinetic aspect of games with.

[20] Bolter, J.D., Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*; London: MIT Press: 3-7.
[21] Dovey, J., Geddings, S., Grant, I., Kelly, K., Lister, M. (eds.) (2009) *New Media: A Critical Introduction*; London: Routledge: 78-80., McLuhan, M. (1964) *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*; London: Routledge: 18-19.
[22] Bolter, J.D., Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*; London: MIT Press: 3-7, 53-56, 273.
[23] Bolter, J.D., Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*; London: MIT Press: 3-7, 45-50.
[24] Ryan, M. (2005) 'On the Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology', in: *Narratology beyond Literary Criticism. Mediality, Disciplinarity*; Meister, J.C. (ed.); Berlin: Walter de Gruyter: 20-21.

1.4.-. The choice for Erin Manning as a theorist of movement systems

1.4.1. A general survey of the study of dance

I started this project with an extensive review of various kinds of studies of dance. Many of these efforts seem to hold a different basic conception of the medium of dance. Theoretical frames for describing dance are often specialized, and geared towards aiding specific choreographic or training practices. This is the case for the choreographer William Forsythe, theorizing how he might reproduce the effects of his installation art pieces, for example, and him coming up with a theory of choreographic objects.[25] Isabel de Cavadas Valverde, another dance scholar and choreographer, conceives of her theoretical terms for digital dance, in looking to foster audience participation for her computer augmented dance performances.[26] Those works that present a more general introduction to the medium of dance mostly list practical and presentational elements that are highly specific to the practice and performance of dance.[27] These name specific gestures, movement phrases, elements of staging, and such. Transposing those interpretive terms for an analysis of games would require too much of a reinterpretation of concepts to be convincing.

Then there are the many works intent on historically situating dance in some cultural tradition, or those intent on outlining the social implications and meaning of a specific genre or performance. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright edited a volume that exemplifies this excavating of histories and cultural influences.[28] Judith Lynne Hanna's examination of sexuality and gender, as they appear in dance performances through years, is another example, as is the phenomenological description of dance by Sondra Horton Fraleigh.[29] In Roger Copeland's overview of Merce Cunningham's influential career as a choreographer and dancer, a specialized language is developed to describe that one choreographers work with.[30] These academic efforts develop terms for specific performances or genres, or to relate dance to specific historical or social contexts.

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[25] Forsythe, W. (s.d.) 'Choreographic Objects, Essay by William Forsythe', in: Synchronous Objects, Media, Quotes and Essays, https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/media/inside.php?p=essay (2018, Jun. 11).

[26] Valverde, I.C. (2002) 'Interfacing Dance and Technology: Towards a Theoretical Framework for Dance in the Digital Domain', in: *Proceedings of COSIGN Conference 2002*; Augsberg: University of Augsberg.

[27] Love, P. (1997) *Modern Dance Terminology: The ABC's of Modern Dance as Defined by Its Originators*; Princeton: Princeton Book Co: 3-12. Reeve, J. (2011) *Dance Improvisations: Warm-Ups, Games and Choreographic Tasks*; Leeds: Human Kinetics: 2-15., Blom, L.A., Chaplin, L.T. (1982) *The Intimate Act of Choreography*; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 3-8.

[28] Albright, A.C., Dils, A. (eds.) (2001) *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*; Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

[29] Hanna, J.L. (1988) *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire*; London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., Fraleigh, S.H. (1987) *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*; London: University of Pittsburgh Press.

[30] Copeland, R. (2004) *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance*; London: Psychology Press.

1.4.2. Erin Manning's more easily transposed media theory and philosophy approach

All these differing theories of dance and its components, either highly specialized or intended as tools for practice, led to my choice of either transposing concepts from one theorist with a broader media studies orientation, or transposing concepts from a group of meaningfully contrasting theorists. Concepts geared towards media studies more generally are defined in a less specialized manner, and already geared towards interpretation and analytic description. This makes those types of concepts easier to transpose and use for interpreting the kinetic aspect of another medium, namely video games. As the broadly outlined philosophical and cultural studies work of Erin Manning proved prolific and theoretically complex enough to fill an entire thesis, those contrasting conceptual frames that I did find are left to a brief mention in the further research section of this thesis.[31]

From this preliminary survey of interpretive theorists of motion, with a special focus on dance, I was inspired the most by Erin Manning's process philosophical effort towards specifying movement forms, based on interpretations of dance performances. Erin Manning is a political philosopher and cultural theorist.[32] She is also active as an artist working with dance and other artistic media. She is one of those theorists of dance, who philosophically experiments with it, as a tool for coming to understand all of reality.[33] To Manning, all media artifacts can be tools for philosophical thinking, being the production of concepts to understand reality with.[34] Dance, in this way, is a medium especially suited for philosophical investigations into the process ontological notion that all reality is always in motion, at all levels of scale, in ways that can be distinguished in minute detail. I take the concepts that she derives for that line of investigation to be especially suited for interpreting the meaning of kinetic systems in games. In her first three books, Manning derives the most concepts from interpretations of dance. These concepts all clearly relate to each other, as well as relating to a more general philosophical investigation of meaningful movement systems. The latter makes these concepts easier to transpose and test on games.[35]

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[31] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press., Massumi, B., Manning, E. (2014) *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., Manning, E. (2016) *The Minor Gesture*; Durham: Duke University Press., Blades, H. (2013) 'Scoring Dance', in: *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*; Vol.10, No.2; Baker, A., Steenhagen, M. (eds.); s.l.: British Society of Aesthetics: 43-57., Novack, C.J. (1990) *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press., Foster, S.L. (2011) *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*; London: Routledge.
[32] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 1-3.
[33] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 5-11.
[34] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 226-228.
[35] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.

1.4.3. Outline of transposed concepts from Manning's work

So for the following chapter, I broadly interpret and transpose some eight main concepts or terms, and those notions that expand on these eight, from Erin Manning's process ontologically induced interpretations of works of dance. These are the eight distinct concepts that most clearly derive from meaningful systems of motion interpreted in dance. Moreover, these eight concepts could be grouped into those focused on discrete individual movers, and those focused on larger systems of movement. This allows me to focus the first part of my extensive case study on how a player's actions are focalized through a discrete player character, moving about in the given game. The second part of the next chapter could then focus on the larger dynamic and adaptive systems that this character is meaningfully shown to be involved in. Manning's concepts are purposefully described in ways that are open to interpretation, so the eight paragraphs in the following chapter include outlines of the three books that I take concepts from, along with outlines of those chapters that these concepts come from, and my extensive interpretations of these concepts. Each paragraph focuses on one main concept, and a selection of relevant related terms. After an initial outline of these concepts, they are applied to an interpretation of my main video game case study. Example case studies are given at the end of each paragraph, of games to which these same concepts don't readily apply, or to which they apply differently. This should at least indicate how Manning's concepts can be used to distinguish between games. Each paragraph opens and closes on a summary of concepts applied, and interpretive findings, up to that point in the chapter.

The first four paragraphs of the next chapter should outline some of the ways that discrete, focalized player motions can appear distinct from, yet involved in, a game's larger systems of play. Following an introductory overview, I first test Manning's concept of a politics of touch, by describing how *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* seems to depicts all its systems of action as intimate physical interactions, performed bodily.[36] Second, Manning's concepts of preacceleration in tango dance, and of metastable movement in posture control, are applied to describe how that same video game continuously invites a player to act on discrete inviting objects.[37] Third, the notion of personal bodily displacement, and the elasticity and relationality of movements opening up more potentials to act, as well as the concept of a technogenetic body, are all used to describe how this game presents a player's actions as enacted through an onscreen character's body.[38] Fourth, I test Manning's concepts of overarticulation and technicity, or how exaggerated motions emphasize consequences and resulting

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[36] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 17-18.
[37] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 14, 43.
[38] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 15, 32-33, 59, 75.

action potentials.[39] These are applied to a case study analysis, of the player's sense in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, that their actions create situations, which demand creative solutions each time.

The final four paragraphs of this first chapter will deal with the same case study, but these collate Manning's concepts for how larger systems of movements appear related to a player's or dancer's minor gestures. The notion of a relationscape is described in the fifth case study paragraph, for example.[40] This concept theorizes how a constellation of minor motions and discrete actors might be framed as a landscape image, tracing the space shared by all these interrelated motions and movers. This concept is illustrated by Manning's concepts of landing sites, of animation's dance, and of extensive-intensive relations. Following this, the sixth main concept described is that of the choreographic proposition, being how individual movers can appear animated mostly by some system of movement or choreography that they share with others.[41] The seventh set of concepts collated from Manning revolves around the notion of mobile architectures, or the notion of how an individual dancer can appear to serve as a choreographer informing or inspiring others to move in a certain way.[42] The final of these eight paragraphs circles back to the initial notion, of motion as a kind of political involvement, with an extended examination of affects and styles of movement that indicate an intent to engage in politics of touch, or in intimate gestures that involve others to share in a movement milieu in specific ways.[43] Diagrammatic praxis, the counterpoint, and the dance of attention, are the concepts illustrating the main concept of playful individuation for this paragraph. My choice for case studies throughout this thesis, to go with transposing the aforementioned concepts to game analysis, is briefly explained in the following paragraph, the last of this introductory chapter.

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[39] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 32, 38.
[40] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 115-116, 170, 183, 201, 210.
[41] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 13-15, 87-93.
[42] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-101.
[43] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 102, 108, 133-134, 138-140, 184-186.

1.5.-. Selection criteria and methodology for case studies

1.5.1. Limiting the range of viable video game case studies

To define a range of viable case studies for this project, I take as a premise Katie Salen's and Eric Zimmerman's popular definition of games.[44] A game is a meaningfully arranged system for playful engagement, comprising rules, goals and quantifiable expressions of current system states. Computer games are a subset of this, that use machinic computation to render and store game states.

Video games are the subset of those, as Grant Tavinor describes, wherein a rasterized screen displays computer rendered imagery, controlled via button presses and joystick movements, performed on a handheld computer control interface, with sound coming from connected stereo speakers.[45] In this dominant, conventional form, a player is seated in front of a screen, focused on the motion picture display, while manipulating the game state via minimal gestures, which are datafied and computed at sufficient rate to produce continuous feedback on the game at play. Specifying a range of case studies to this degree means that the physical form, environment, and interface of the games that I describe are a given.[46] This precludes my having to describe a player's physical movements, and the game's control interface, allowing me to focus on diegetic systems of play and movement in case studies.

Within the video game form, I also select for those video games that focalize action through a digitally simulated player character. This popular trope is often termed a player avatar.[47] Within this set of games, I also select for those games that have a camera frame following the full bodies of these player characters, from a medium range. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska describe this display style, often termed a third person view.[48] Point of view camera framings in other such games, or bird's eye views, or extreme long shot framings, are all less obviously concerned with choreography and movement, and so less easily described with those kinds of terms.[49]

Finally, I selected for popular video games, found in public discourse like enthusiast press websites and internet forums.[50] These are games that are easy to access, in styles commonly understood

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[44] Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004) *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*; Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 2-7, 73-81.

[45] Tavinor, G. (2009) *The Art of Videogames (New Directions in Aesthetics)*; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: 26-29.

[46] Richardson, I. (2007) 'Pocket Technospaces: the Bodily Incorporation of Mobile Media', in: *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*; Vol.21, No.2; London: Routledge: 205-214.

[47] Küchlich, J. (2006) 'Literary theory and digital games', in: *Understanding Digital Games*; Bryce, J., Rutter, J. (eds.); London: SAGE Publications Ltd.: 107-110.

[48] King, G., Krzywinska, T. (2006) 'Film studies and digital games', in: *Understanding Digital Games*; Bryce, J., Rutter, J. (eds.); London: SAGE Publications Ltd.: 116-118.

[49] King, G., Krzywinska, T. (2006) 'Film studies and digital games', in: *Understanding Digital Games*; Bryce, J., Rutter, J. (eds.); London: SAGE Publications Ltd.: 117-120.

[50] Shoemaker, B. (2014, Sep. 30) 'Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor Review', in: Giantbomb, Reviews, https://www.giantbomb.com/reviews/middle-earth-shadow-of-mordor-review/1900-673/ (2018, Jun. 11)., s.n. (2013, Nov. 14) 'Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor - Message Board', in: Gamefaqs, PC, Action Adventure, Open-World, Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/739525-middle-earth-shadow-of-mordor (2018, Jun. 11).

and recognized by a general audience. Given their influence on popular culture, these games perhaps deserve analytic scrutiny all the more.

1.5.2. Outline of the main and supplementary case studies

The main case study in the following is *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*.[51] In this video game, the player controls a medium long shot camera frame, always centered on a player character, whom they also control with minute finger gestures registered on one or several of the buttons and joysticks of a handheld computer control interface.[52] This game contextualizes its action as a one man counter-occupation guerilla war, performed by a player character who has been robbed of his family and homeland, by an invading army that holds to a hyperviolent slave keeping meritocracy.[53] This player character is inhabited by an ancient ghost, whom they share this grievance with. Both of them set out to infiltrate the occupying force, and to eliminate the army leadership, while freeing slaves and sabotaging army operations.

The player character can be made to run and climb, sneak and distract, to quietly assassinate soldiers, set enthralled allies against them, or to fight the enemy openly. The player is scored for every action. Score tokens can be used to attain new abilities for the player character to use, for dealing with the game's simulated environment, with their limited resources, and with the enemy army hierarchy.[54] The game's systems, when in play, actively counter all of the player's efforts to assert themselves, in unpredictable but overt ways.[55] The player is hunted equally as doggedly as they themselves might hunt enemy commanders, for example. Moreover, the enemy leadership is wont to turn on its own as well. On top of this, all of the player's influences are temporary. The opposing army fills in for executed soldiers and sabotaged defenses after only a short pause.

This constant dynamism, with all these moving parts at all manner of scales, all depicted as physically embodied entities, is what makes the game a good fit for Erin Manning's conceptual framework for meaningful movement systems. As counterexamples in the chapter might indicate, and they draw from an extensive survey of relevant case studies, a video game with so many constantly

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[51] De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[52] 'Shell Interface - Options - Controller Mapping', 'Shell Interface - Options - Keyboard & Mouse', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[53] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[54] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[55] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

moving parts, meaningfully arranged, is rare. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is extensively analyzed, because it expressly and comprehensively fits Manning's conceptual frame for meaningfully interrelated motion at all scales.

Counterexamples to this main case study are, as mentioned, games with similar systems of action, controlled similarly, but for which the same interpretive concepts apply differently, or not at all. These games illustrate the viability of the examined terms, for at least distinguishing between different expressions of similar movement systems. Counterexamples are games from the *Assassin's Creed* series, but also games like *Bayonetta*, *Kingdom Hearts II*, and smaller games such as *Canabalt* and *Samurai Lantern*.[56]

1.5.3. Formal game studies methodology for case study analysis

For a methodology, in my case studies, I focus on meaningfully actionable systems, as Ian Bogost describes them, more than on paratextually given narrative context.[57] My case studies are material object analyses, as Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Marianne van den Boomen, and Bram de Rijk define it. These case studies are only my secondary object of analysis, serving to exemplify the viability of transposing interpretive terms for movement systems.[58] I combine what Clara Fernández-Vara, Steffan Björk, and Petri Lankoski call a structuralist formal, and a representational analysis. This means that I emphasize the formal analysis of components and actors in my case studies, with only brief mentions of diegetic meaning or presentational properties.[59]

Each case study game was played analytically, to observe and take notes on relations to a given paragraphs' main concepts. This follows the example of Espen Aarseth.[60] I alternated between superficial play and non-play approaches, supplementing past experiences of a given game with expert level and complete play sessions performed and recorded by others.

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[56] Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft., Désilets, P., May, C., Puel, S. (2009), *Assassin's Creed II*. Montreal: Ubisoft., Guesdon, J., Ismail, A., May, C., McDevitt, D. (2013), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal., Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta.* Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc., Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd., Saltsman, A., Saltsman, R. (2009), *Canabalt*. Austin: Finji., s.n. (2016), *Samurai Lantern*. s.l.: AdventureBit.
[57] Bogost, I. (2008) 'The Rhetoric of Video Games.', in: *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*; Salen, K. (ed.); Part of 'The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning'; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 120-123, 125-128., Bogost, I. (2007) *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*; Cambridge: The MIT Press: 2-10, 42-44.
[58] De Rijk, B., Lehmann, A., Van den Boomen, M. (s.d.) *New Media Studies Method Reader*; Utrecht: Utrecht University: 9-13.
[59] Fernández-Vara, C. (2015) *Introduction to Game Analysis*; London: Routledge: 15-17, 117-172., Björk, S., Lankoski, P. (2015) 'Formal analysis of gameplay', in: *Game research methods*; Björk, S., Lankoski, P. (eds.); Pittsburgh: ETC Press: 24-28.
[60] Aarseth, E.J. (2003) 'Playing Research: Methodological approaches to game analysis', in: *Fine Art Forum*; Vol.17, No.8; s.n. (eds.); s.l.: MelbourneDAC 2003, Fine Art Forum: 1-7.

2.-.-. Erin Manning's terms for being moved by games

2.1.-. Chapter outline

To reiterate, the following paragraphs go through eight main concepts of Erin Manning's, each with some relevant explanatory concepts, to apply each to interpreting aspect of the video game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Each paragraph contains detailed interpretations and contextualizations of Manning's concepts, for interpreting meaningful movement systems, but these eight diagram illustrations might provide for a useful introductory overview. In order, from left to right, top to bottom, the main concepts displayed, standing for each of the following paragraphs, are:

1. politics of touch 2. preacceleration 3. technogenetic bodily displacement 4. overarticulation

5. relationscape 6. choreographic proposition 7. mobile architecture 8. attentive diagrammatic play
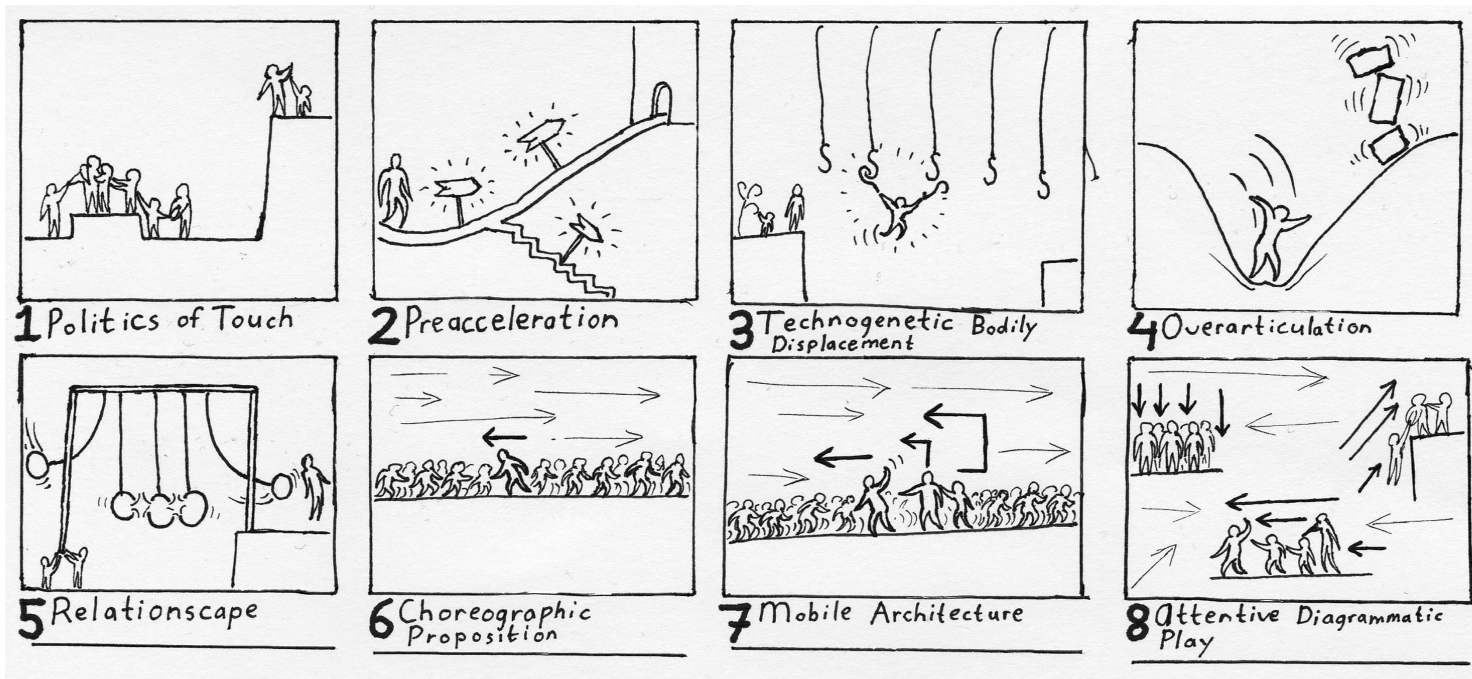

Figure 01 - Illustrative diagrams for the main concept of each of the following paragraphs.

The first of Manning's concepts to be tested in the following, from her first published book, is the notion of a politics of touch.[61] Manning describes the originary form of tango dance, as a transnational political way of experimenting with physical proximity and touch. The dominant style of interaction that *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* displays might be such a politics of touch.

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[61] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 17-18.
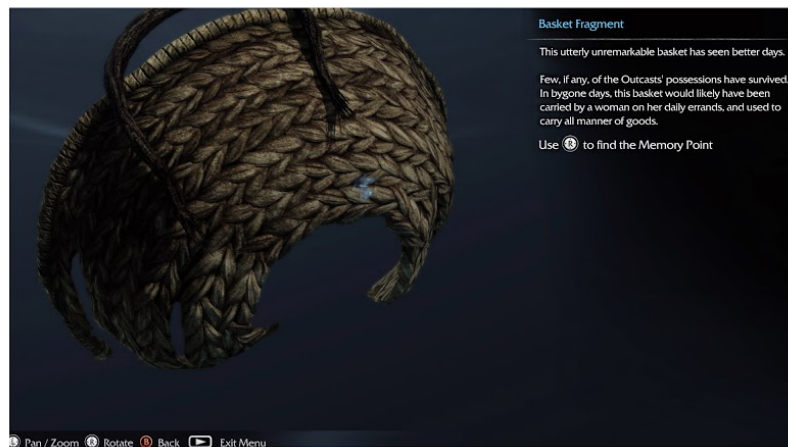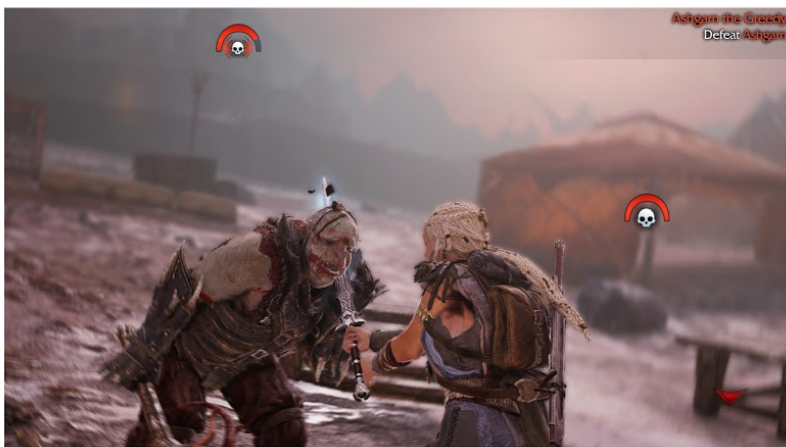
Figure 02 - Top left shows the player character physically handling an occupation army officer in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor. That screen shows button prompts for forcing directions to a higher ranking assassination target out of them. This furthers the player character's one person guerilla war in their occupied homeland. The top right image shows the unspecific directions on the map screen interface that this action yields, which encourages a physical search instead. The bottom left image shows the player character physically confronting a specific threat to their subsistence, which allows some rare temporary influence over some of the state of this world. The bottom right image implies how other action systems in the game, an archaeological excavation in this case, are also depicted as physically handled.

2.2.-. The politics of touch in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*

2.2.1. Paragraph outline

Using the concept of politics of touch, similarly to how Erin Manning applies it in her description of tango dance, games might be seen as framing individual physical performance in imbrication with larger systems of action and governance.[62] This paragraph more specifically outlines, briefly, how any single player's performance can be interpreted as a performative counterpoint to the total current state of a given game's fictional world. A player's performance in the video game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, as focalized through their onscreen player character, gives one apt example.[63] In a way, whatever a player character is made to do in this game shifts one's perception of the game in its entirety. This game specifically foregrounds that, inasmuch as Manning sees the originary forms of improvised tango as foregrounding how a given host nation or culture regards its show of two bodies in proximity, moving freely for a time under one another's negotiated influence.[64]

2.2.2. General summary of Manning's *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*

In her first book, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, Erin Manning sees political forms of touch, in how the film *Happy Together* shows a more and more dejected couple relapsing repeatedly into sheltering each other, from the abusive relationships that follow each of their breakups.[65] Manning recognizes a politicization of touch with Christianity's myth of Eve's original sin at naively, narcissistically grasping for new experiences.[66] Manning relates diplomatic tact and politeness directly to politics, along with many other examples.[67]

2.2.3. Interpretation of the politics of touch concept

Her initial example for this broad political concept comes from the world of dance, from the tango dance form. In the originary form of tango, Manning describes, two dancers encounter each other intimately and closely, for a short arranged time, as they improvisationally select from a system of conventionalized

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[62] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 17-18.

[63] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[64] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 3-5, 14-15.

[65] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 19-21, 47-48.

[66] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 49, 82.

[67] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: xvi-xxiii, 134-135.

motions.[68] They lead each other on, and follow accordingly, respectfully exploring personal boundaries by using subtle gestures and suggestions, by sometimes switching roles, and by holding to a challenging proximity.[69]

This practice of tact and courtesy can be meaningful, regardless of the overriding nation or culture hosting it, Manning says. As a dance form, it can invite two people everywhere, to challenge what physical proximity, moving together, and tactful touch can mean in their political space. Tango serves as Manning's initial example of what influential practices of politics might exist in tactility, distinct from political bodies such as nationality, ethnicity, culture, or trade.[70] As a performative form, it resists outside representation or policy, but as a kind of politics of touch, tango can still be political in a concrete manner.[71]

2.2.4. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the politics of touch concept

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor is a video game exemplary of this concept of the politics of touch, especially as Manning sees it exhibited in tango.[72] Compared to other games of its type, and thematically apt for its own narrative, this game's emphasis on pursuing political action through physical struggle is notable. The game also ties these tactile interpersonal struggles into larger political shifts and systems.

To clarify, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* casts its single player as a one person guerrilla combatant, magically augmented by a ghost that co-inhabits their body.[73] This player character is tasked, by the game's contextualizing narrative events as well as its adaptive emergent situations, to subsist in occupied lands. They are to evade open combat, root out chances for sabotage and eliminating enemy commanders, while scouring the game's two fortified valleys for supplies and survival training opportunities.[74] All the while, the occupying army hunts the player character, as much as they are hunting them. Enemy ranks are filled almost as swiftly as the player character diminishes them, and

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[68] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 1-2.

[69] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 4.

[70] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 5, 14-15.

[71] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 17-18.

[72] De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[73] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[74] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

there is no obvious chance of quickly and totally overthrowing this occupation.[75] The player character can only leave transient marks of resistance in the game's fictional world, but each small physical act interrogates this violent occupation's presumed stability.

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor seems to foreground a politics of touch throughout its interactive systems. Even if its fictional political system is troublingly violent, and is only superficially contextualized by the game's narrative, the practice of engaging with this system can otherwise be described as akin to the originary forms of tango dance that Manning analyzed. Summarized broadly, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* enables and encourages a form of political engagement for the player, which limits them to changing the state of governance in that game's fictional world, only by physically engaging those discrete actors inhabiting it.[76]

The player is tasked with engaging each actor in this game's fictionally medievalist, hyperviolent meritocracy on equal footing, in physical and tangible proximity. With each enemy patrol or commander fought and killed, a respite from prosecution appears locally.[77] Games of this type generally abstract their peripheral affordances into superimposed shell interfaces. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, though, things like getting directions on where to go, from a shell interface map, are discouraged with vague or convoluted information.[78] The map interface doesn't give precise coordinates, and doesn't show any of the unpredictably roaming patrols or dynamic events, which would otherwise determine a player's best route.[79] The player is better off physically scanning for fast and safe routes through a given environment, by temporarily activating a special filter to augment the game's camera, as they orbit it around their player character.[80] This camera mode represents what supplemental information the player character's co-inhabiting ghost can magically observe. The player character's normal activities are inhibited when this way of looking is engaged, though. As another example, clear goal statements for productive tasks only appear when a physical task is completed. Talking to some enslaved natives, their guards either distracted or killed, can get these slaves to task you with sabotaging some military equipment or prison camp nearby. Finding the right hiding spot can start an emergent or prescribed mission nearby.

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[75] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[76] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Warchief Hunt', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[77] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[78] 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity - Marked Target', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[79] 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Bow Legends, The Storm of War', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[80] 'Wraith Vision Interface', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

Interrogating any enemy soldier helps get directions or descriptions to help eliminate their commanders. [81] As a final example of the game foregoing abstract interfaces for physical interactions, the fictional history and culture of this world has to mostly be physically sighted, then excavated and read, from select artifact stashes and ruin sites. [82] Excavated objects are picked up by the player character, then rotated in hand until some event from their history is magically heard, through the ghost that co-inhabits the player character's body.

2.2.5. Contrasting examples of this concept in other games

These are just some of the examples of how this game physicalizes everything that a player can do, focalizing each action as something the player character performs bodily. Each such action overtly influences some minute aspect of the game's larger setting as well. The game generally does not abstract afforded activities into shell interfaces or alternate modes of play. The highly influential and popular games in the *Assassin's Creed* series, as a typical example, can be navigated just by gazing at map directions. [83] Those games have mission statements that appear superimposed in prescribed situations. [84] They also convey their fictional worlds' histories through separate shell interface repositories, away from the player character's bodily activities in the game's simulated spaces. [85]

2.2.6. Summary of findings

Rather than tango's politics of a briefly staged respectful coexistence, which is softly challenged and toyed with in that dance form, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* enables a politics of temporarily evading, eliminating, scaring off, or mentally dominating a continuous supply of discrete reciprocal threats to one's sustained physical presence, in the game's fictional hyperviolent meritocracy. Manning's concept of a politics of touch seems notably suited, though, for describing this overarching stylization of whatever a player does in the game.

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[81] 'Outcast Rescue Missions - The Fallen', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Interrogate Soldier Interface', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Gain Intel', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[82] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Lore', 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Artifacts', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[83] Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft., Désilets, P., May, C., Puel, S. (2009), *Assassin's Creed II*. Montreal: Ubisoft., Guesdon, J., Ismail, A., May, C., McDevitt, D. (2013), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.

[84] 'Mister Walpole, I Presume', 'Havana', 'Shell Interface - World Map', 'Treasure Maps - 633-784 Nassau', 'Shell Interface - Progression Tracker', in: Guesdon, J., Ismail, A., May, C., McDevitt, D. (2013), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.

[85] 'Shell Interface - Database - Landmarks - Nassau - The Queen's Staircase', in: Guesdon, J., Ismail, A., May, C., McDevitt, D. (2013), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.

There's constant emphasis to how a player character is made to change their fictional world's political state, purely through direct and tangible engagements with discrete actors. In the following paragraph, the concepts of preacceleration and metastable movement, from Manning's next published book, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, are experimentally applied to interpret the same video game in more specific detail.[86]

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[86] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.
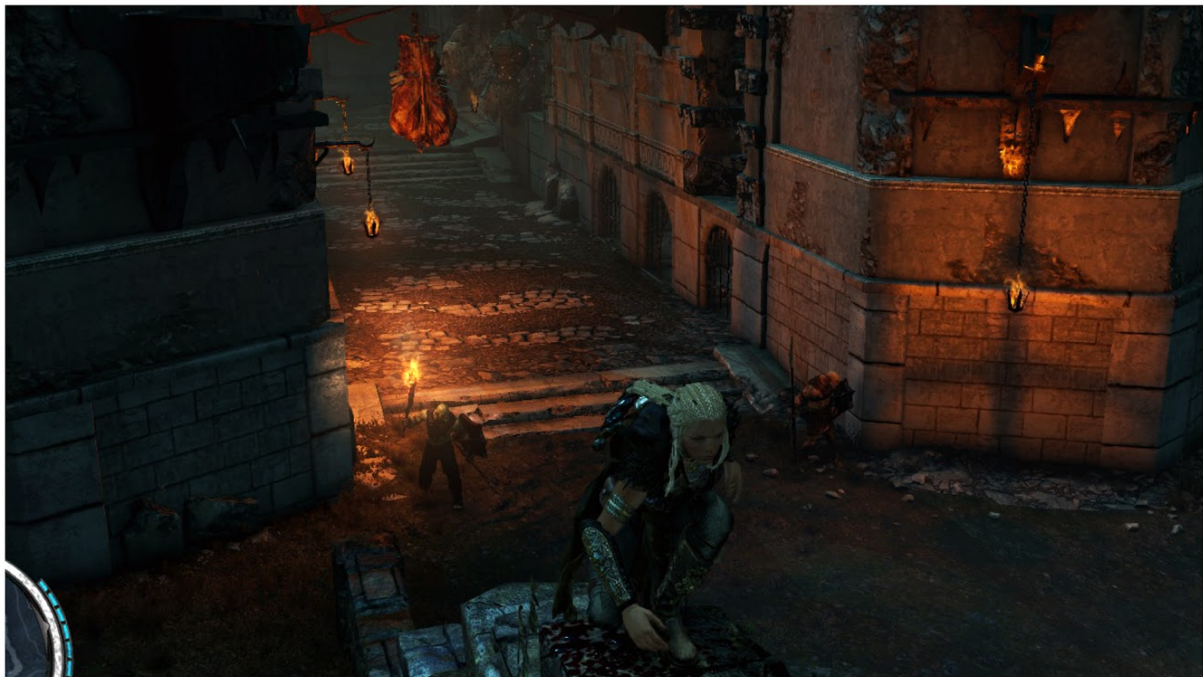
Figure 03 - The top image shows one of the typically densely packed actionable landscapes in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor. Dynamic preaccelerating elements include rooftop guard patrols out for the player character, bushes and crevices to hide in, caged animals to free, and walls to scale. The bottom image shows the same site at another time of day, with different weather and new guards, showing how the game can move on with its player idle.

2.3.-. Preacceleration and metastable movement in video games

2.3.1. Paragraph Outline

Building on the concept of a politics of touch, used by Erin Manning to interpret the political aspect of physical proximity and tactility in tango, this next paragraph takes her concept of preacceleration, and that of metastable movement. These come from the initial analyses of dance in her next book, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*.[87] The politics of touch in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* posit its player character as engaged bodily in the political machinations of its fictional world.Everything done in the game is done physically, and each act influences the game's fictional politics to some limited degree, or at least recontextualizes them in some way.

Manning's notion of preacceleration helps interpret, then, some of the precise objects and actors that get a player to even bother having their character act and gesture. Each discrete preacceleration incites a specific line of action, for the given duration of their appearance.[88] This prevalent preacceleration gives a constant sense of being somehow moved to act. Even for an inactive player, this same sense appears, as conceivable with Manning's notion of metastable motion.[89]

2.3.2. General summary of Manning's *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*

In *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, Manning shifts her focus from the preceding book's politically interpreting expressions of tangible intimacy.[90] This second book focuses on artistic expressions that aesthetically evoke intimate experiences, and which inform or illustrate some larger experiential frame and imaginative capacity by doing so.[91] This book isn't about minor gestures as distinct from larger political systems, but about small aesthetic motions that draw a framed map of larger discourses.

The visual installation art of David Spriggs is given as one example.[92] Some of his works emphasize optical illusions, which in turn convey how a viewer's gaze can be made to notice manipulative visual experiences. Pioneering scientific photographer Étienne-Jules Maray is another example. His experimental photographic machinery seemed, over the years, more and more geared towards replicating the very movements they had initially helped him photograph.[93] Other examples

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[87] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 14, 43.
[88] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 19-20.
[89] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 45-47.
[90] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 134-135, 152.
[91] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 8-9, 226-228.
[92] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 145, 150.
[93] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 106-110.

come from the highly influential early propaganda films by Leni Riefenstahl.[94] Riefenstahl is described as inventing camera techniques and cinematography, specialized to evocatively and energetically align cinematography techniques with the motion picture imagery they were intended to register.[95] Manning closes her book by describing those Aboriginal artistic traditions, with special attention for the artist Dorothy Napangardi, that produce framed landscape paintings of experiential and mythological realms imbricated in actual geography. These implicate a viewer bodily, with their directing the eyes by colored contrasts and striking shapes, with their evocative conceptual context and display situation, in the very ritual of visually reproducing landscape aspects, that these paintings would otherwise seem themselves to be the mere product of.[96] They draw a viewer into the ritualized process of their creation, into these systems of discrete relative movers sharing a space, as much as they draw a viewer into impressions of some physical geography.[97] Manning also repeatedly goes to examples from dance, of such intimate motions and perceptions informing an imagination of larger perceptual or animating systems. The concepts she derives from dance, especially, are taken up in these following paragraphs, to the purpose of describing motion in games.

2.3.3. Interpretation of the preacceleration concept

For this second book, Manning again takes up analyses of dance as her initial examples, of minor gestures and intimate physical motions being informative of those larger systems of movement that they are involved with.[98] Manning describes the intimate improvised partner dance of tango once more, this time in terms set out by the likes of Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni, terms by choreographer William Forsythe', and by a range of process philosophers.[99] Manning conceptualizes preacceleration, to describe the experience being invited to move along, in a partner dance where the other is held so close, and reactions are expected so fast.

Invitations and reactions occur almost unnoticed in tango, seeming like preaccelerations to the actual displacement of dancers.[100] You almost do not experience yourself accelerating in response to the rhythm of another person's leg retracting, clearing ground for your next step. Instead, every move made seems preaccelerated, before you notice making it, like you and your dance partner create the rhythm of a dance together, while in motion. When this goes well, with both dancers attuned to each other, and to

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[94] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 119-122.
[95] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 131-135.
[96] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 153-157, 170-171, 187-190
[97] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 199-204.
[98] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 13-15.
[99] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 15-16, 18-19.
[100] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 14, 18-19.

the performance stage, then moves are expected, invited, informed, and proceeding, before movements are even conscious. Neither dance partner would be consciously interpreting gestures, and selecting a response, yet the intensity of interpretation and response options is still felt while dancing, along with the shifting responsibility between dancers, to keep the dance going. Preacceleration is a conception of how actions might feel informed by other discrete actors, even before they are consciously performed.

2.3.4. Interpretation of the metastable movement concept

To explain this same sensation occurring when one is motionless, Manning takes a later chapter to describe research into posture control, mainly from exercise therapy work by Moshé Feldenkrais.[101] She comes to the notion that stillness might be a metastable form of movement. Even the most stable of postures, analysts show, are rife with subtle balancing motions, and with the fidgeting of restrained energy.[102] This is all the more so for people tasked to take note of their stillness. Manning describes this aspect of stable postures as metastable movement, because postures seem held by noticing micromovements and preaccelerations, to then meticulously compensate for them, and work to let them pass through without influence. Stasis is a metastable engagement with preaccelerations, rather than a lack of movement.[103]

2.3.5. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the preacceleration concept

In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, there are similar discrete preaccelerating actors and objects, inviting relational movements with the way they gesture, and with how they are represented. On ground level, in the game's simulated environments, there are all these elements that get a player to continuously check for quiet and quick routes from place to place. Objects like shrubbery and hollow wallspaces can hide the player character from enemy sight. Footholds allow them to push off into a quick sprint. Cable bridges and scaleable walls provide for elevated travel.[104] At elevated levels, windscreens and turrets on ruin walls provide covert paths, often left unguarded.[105] The many unpredictably wandering groups of soldiers invite such evasive travel. When such groups are engaged directly, though, the player is motivated to focus on attacking the weaknesses of commanding figures, to rout other soldiers in the group quickly.[106]

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[101] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 43-44.
[102] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 44.
[103] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 45, 47.
[104] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Elven Swiftness', 'Black Gate', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[105] 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[106] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Brutalize', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

The density of such elements in this game, as they constantly invite and influence decision making on how to act, with standardized and recognizable responses prompted for each category of object, keeps the player active and mobile. Often, so much goes on at once, with such urgency, that a player is forced to not think, to instead just act on impulse.

Imagine a player is having their player character stand still at an enemy fortification, walled up and full of idle patrols and wandering guards.[107] The player might be scanning for a way to enter, to free some of its now enslaved native inhabitants, which are tied up or put to demolition work. The player character might be held in wait by the player, until day passes to night at artificially accelerated pace, or until a storm comes, to mask their actions with noise, haze, and darkness. The player character would be safer if perched atop the camp's front wall. Shining metal handholds and outcroppings invite climbing up there. Oblivious guards, idling nearby, will be looking down at the ground exaggeratedly, muttering amongst themselves, instead of scanning for the player. A guard turned away from the player character could be sneaked up on, and be knocked out before others around the fortified camp notice.[108] A player might also wait until this guard reaches its fellows at a nearby campfire, to then take them all out with an arrow shot that scatters and spreads this fire.[109] A slower approach would be to poison a supply of drinks, stashed by the front wall, which these guards will regularly be seen drinking from.[110] Trails of knee-height rocks, tree trunks, benches, and the like imply quick paths around and through the camp, or paths to a quick escape. The player character can hop over knee-height obstacles, and then be made to push off of them, into a sprint. Passing guard patrols and hunting parties lend urgency to all these considerations, meanwhile, as army operations seem ongoing while a player is idling. An open brawl, upon discovery by such patrols, or if stealth fails, is a constant risk. Unattended weapon racks near to prisoners in such camps, finally, assure that any released prisoners would be an aid during such fights.[111]

2.3.6. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the metastable movement concept

The preceding gives just some of the discrete and physically embodied prompts to action informing a player during most situations of this game. Movements like the weather or sun cycling by, like guard patrols or hunting parties passing through, like the enemy army's hierarchy shifting as commanders

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[107] 'Black Gate', 'Outcast Rescue Missions - Resistance', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[108] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[109] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Detonate', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[110] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Poison', 'Hirgon's Story Arc - The Outcasts', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[111] 'Outcast Rescue Missions - The Uprising', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

sabotage or supplant one another, all emphasize player idleness as just a metastability.[112] Preaccelerating elements like handholds and tightropes, or the exaggerated motions conveying an enemy soldiers' intent in battle, are just some of the many parts diegetically lending a constant sense of urgency to any freedom that the player has.

Besides diegetic preaccelerations, superimposed instruction icons and text labels prescribe appropriate control interface button presses, or joystick gestures, relevant to each actionable object or agents near to the player character.[113] Especially during an open brawl, or in the harried execution of a complex plan with many moving parts, these overt prompts are like to be ignored in favor of impulsive responses to the game's high fidelity animations, visual effects, and sound effects, all stylized to clearly convey what responses each discrete object can take.[114] When an enemy soldier, ahead of their warband trailing behind, moves in for an axe strike, there are overlaid instructions on how to block, evade, or counter that hit. A player is more like, with the urgency of these situations, to get good at predicting such attacks by reading the enemy's proximity, body language, and battle cry.

2.3.7. Contrasting examples of these concepts in other games

The breadth and variety of simultaneously foregrounded preaccelerations, even for an inactive player, are what make *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* stand out. In similar video games, like *Transistor*, the immediate influence of preaccelerations is often downplayed, as the player is comfortably able to pause the game's action, to then extensively consider the preaccelerations set out before them.[115] In *Transistor*, a player can even move their player character about while the game is in this semi-paused state. Like most video games, *Transistor* also doesn't exhibit much metastable movement, when the player is not engaged in the action of its main mode of play. In many games, the fictional world seems static, or stuck in repetitive behavior cycles, except when a player acts to change things.[116]

A game like *Canabalt*, in contrast, does emphasize preaccelerations.[117] Its player character automatically runs along a track, and has to be made to jump when gaps in that track show up. The game ends if they fall off the screen. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* has a notably wider range of

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[112] 'The Valley of Udûn - Weather Cycle - Hail', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[113] 'Shell Interface - Options - Game Settings', 'Heads-up Display', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[114] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[115] 'Intro - Second Battle', in: Kasavin, G., Rao, A. (2014), *Transistor*. San Jose: Supergiant Games, Inc.
[116] 'To the Empty Set - Alley North of Junction Jan's', in: Kasavin, G., Rao, A. (2014), *Transistor*. San Jose: Supergiant Games, Inc.
[117] 'Up to 110 Meters', Saltsman, A., Saltsman, R. (2009), *Canabalt*. Austin: Finji.

preaccelerations asking for attention at any given moment. Their simultaneity, moreover, begs consideration of how preaccelerations always convey a range of movement potentials, rather than singular prescriptions. In games like *Canabalt*, there is a lack of metastable movement. Every prompt to have the player character jump has to be responded to, or else the game just ends and immediately reverts to its starting state.[118] Metastable movement in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* encourages taking the game on at one's own pace, examining options, if the situation allows it.

2.3.8. Summary of findings

The preceding paragraph observed a physically embodied and locally situated style to the actions taken in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. This present paragraph shows that physicality appearing due to discrete game elements, rendered to invite action. These disparate invitations to act, whether noticed or unnoticed, can be described with Manning's concept of preacceleration. In this case, what moves a player appears even when they keep still, as metastable movement. Everything in the violently disputed world of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* seems in constant motion, fittingly. A sense of metastable movement lends added urgency to any pause taken. Overt preaccelerations draw the player into partaking of the game's exhilarating horror of being prey to a violent occupation, constantly and variously prompted to fight for subsistence, rather than flee or do nothing. The following paragraph uses another four concepts, from Manning's readings of dance in *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, to frame player engagement as the apparent other side to these calls to action.

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[118] 'Game Over Screen', in: Saltsman, A., Saltsman, R. (2009), *Canabalt*. Austin: Finji.

Figure 04 - Centered here is the technically capable and technologically well equipped player character's body in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, poised to displace themselves relative to the guard idling below to the left, outlined in red. The player character is poised to act on one of the movement prompts superimposed at the bottom right. Each commits them to a single line of action, before new options to act might open up elastically.

2.4.-. Elastic, relational, technogenetic displacement as player engagement

2.4.1. Paragraph Outline

Transposing Manning's concepts to interpret *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, this chapter has so far yielded detailed and specific descriptions of how the game presents all action as bodily and tangible, expressing its hyperviolent politics of touch. I also described the dense web of preaccelerating objects and actors that prompt specific actions. Whenever a player pauses, the game explicitly moves along, which makes each pause appear a metastable movement.

Four more of Manning's terms can help describe how the player might feels moved but separate in this game, like a discrete and concrete entity considering how to move along with everything the game proposes. This individuated sense of moving, can be described with concepts for the elasticity of the almost, for relational movement, for displacement, and for the technogenetic body.[119] The first describes the closing of distance to one's goal, and the disappearing of potentials to act differently, which appear again as an action lands. This can be perceived as an elasticity of sorts. A reciprocality of movement and consequence indicates relational movement, to Manning. More than one mover seem necessary for each movement, if things moved by your actions keep moving you in turn. Manning names one's personal sense of moving, as separate from the perceived system that facilitates and incites movement, a discrete displacement. Displacement is implied by the other concepts in this paragraph, and as a result does not appear as pronounced and differentiated in the case study of this paragraph. Each displacement gives a sense of having invented, or reinventing, and mobilizing techniques of movement, drawn from within one's own body. To Manning, this sense is of deploying a technically apt body indicates a technogenetic body, or a body that can generate specialized techniques for each of its displacements. These four concepts outline the experience of being a conscious mover. As such, they may be useful in conceiving of a player's distinct experience, when they respond to a game's invitations to act.

2.4.2. Interpretation of the displacement concept

Manning's concept of displacement is developed as part of her analysis of tango dance, in the first chapter of *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*.[120] She initially describes displacement as how movement is seen within a Cartesian conception of geometry.[121] Displacement is how movement looks when you hold to a static and regimented conception of space and time. When the distance and duration of a movement are seen in relation to a fixed background, with an outside system of

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[119] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 15, 32-33, 59, 75.
[120] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 13-14.
[121] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 15, 27.

measurement, movement seems a relative displacement. Manning contends that displacements also appear against dynamic and adaptive backgrounds, shifting systems of interrelated preaccelerations, but then they are just brief impressions of individual agency being deployed, before something else moves in to shift the structure of movement again.[122]

In tango dance, a displacement is the perception that might appear to you, of you discretely and autonomously moving your body, relative to your dance partner, and relative to a stage or other dancers. [123] A sense of displacement might appear in those fleeting moments before you are invited into the next move, or in those fleeting moments when unexpected things happen that force you to think or fumble for a bit. Each time a displacement like this is noticed, the shifting circumstances of this conscious individual motion appear more pronounced as well.[124] Fumbling to find the right way to move your foot closer to the other dancer, for example, you might notice only the limited floorspace available, and the quick response needed to keep the dance moving smoothly. By contrast, when swaying too close to the audience, or to other dancers, your evasive displacement will take multiple steps and wide arcs across the stage.

2.4.3. Interpretation of the elasticity of the almost concept

Manning conceives of the concept of elasticity in the second chapter of this book, by further theorizing movement in tango dance, and in the everyday practice of walking.[125] A variety of process philosophers is cited for these analyses.[126] Elasticity in movement, again, appears most clearly when you notice yourself moving as a discrete actor. The concept alludes to how other potential lines of action gradually appear more clearly precluded as a chosen gesture is performed, while a range of potential actions suddenly snaps into focus as a move is landing.[127]

This ebb and flow of what could happen, of the almost, has an elasticity to it, when noticed while moving. Standing on an empty stage, asked to improvise, there's the high intensity experience of all these potential actions you could take.[128] All this probability disappears for a bit, as you might decide to take a first small step circling clockwise. It might elastically snap into appearance again, in the inertia after completing that move, as you have to choose how to mitigate or redirect your momentum onto a next move. On a crowded stage, this elasticity might appear less intense, with less room to freely move.

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[122] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 16-17, 25-27.
[123] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 14.
[124] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 15, 28.
[125] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 29-31.
[126] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 34, 39, 41.
[127] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 32, 41-42.
[128] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 30-32.

The higher risk of accidentally bumping into someone, though, makes the experience of elasticity appear more often, as movements have to be more calculated.

2.4.4. Interpretation of the relational movement concept

To conceive of movement as relational, neither automatic nor fully autonomous, Manning takes a later chapter to explore research on post-encephaletis lethargica syndrome.[129] This supplements Manning's thought on what makes us take each next step, after each slight pause, merely when walking.[130] Patients diagnosed with post-encephaletis lethargica syndrome, as Manning notes by their own accounts, are pathologically motionless, since they cannot recognize or distinguish specific outside invitations to move, nor can they imagine what would happen if they did move.[131] Their stilness is an inertia, in the face of all these unfiltered forces that appear intent on moving them.

Being able to move, on this premise, can be conceived of as being able to perceive and direct one's actions as a response to discrete preaccelerations.[132] To Manning, this illustrates how someone's displacements are necessarily relational.[133] One would otherwise be unable to conceive of specific reasons for moving, nor of specific directions to move in.

2.4.5. Interpretation of the technogenetic body concept

In the chapter that follows this, Manning conceives of the technological aspect that appears as part of such relational motions. If you notice yourself moving as a response to preaccelerations, then that can appear as deploying practiced or invented techniques, with the use of one's discrete body. Actions can appear as the generating or deployment of techniques and technologies in this way.

Manning describes this with examples from dance technological projects. These mostly fail in their intent to convey or develop how dancers generate gestures, specifically with aid from computer technology.[134] Some of the projects Manning mentions instead use technology just to register and record motions, as they occur, in various forms.[135] Other projects appear to impose technological restrictions on dancers, as they engage with such recording technologies, instead of enabling the creation of gestures as a technology, or enabling technology to create gestures.[136] Recording dance moves, to play back

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[129] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 50.
[130] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 49.
[131] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 53-54.
[132] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 56.
[133] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 58-59.
[134] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 61-62, 65-66.
[135] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 63.
[136] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 64.

computer generated imagery in response, is one failure of this kind. Having dance moves constrained by the rhythm of a musical composition is another, more rudimentary example.

Manning takes up various process philosophers, Alfred North Whitehead chief among them, to conceive of how techniques and technologies can instead be made to emphasize, and actually complement, the generative technical potential of a body in motion.[137] Technological augmentations of this kind would illustrate what Manning calls a technogenetic body, which displaces itself by means of noticeable and discrete techniques or technologies, invented to suit the situation. The efficacy of techniques is determined and selected for by this body itself.

As an illustrative example, Manning mainly considers a dancer relating to the technology of a podium stage beneath them.[138] To a dancing body, the surrounding stage, footwear and costuming, or even the other dancers present, can be seen and acted on as technological tools of sorts, each supplementing their own range of motion. Those actors and elements, complementing or preaccelerating a dancer's body, would see that dancer as generating and testing techniques of movement in relation to them.

A stage can be considered as a technological prosthetic, that extends the dancer's body, allowing them to take steps and launch jumps. A stage also demands that the dancer quickly invent, adapt, and deploy new bodily techniques, for each time that they land and intend to keep moving. If a dancer overstretches a tendon in their leg, for example, they might have to invent a quick use of their other leg, to keep building momentum for some next move. The dancer might notice and play into their inertia along the flat stage surface, and how it informs the range and angle for each next step.

In moving, a body seperate from preaccelerating elements can be seen to generate discrete techniques. Such a body can also technologize and extend its reach with the use of other objects. What little Manning alludes to, when thinking of a technologically augmented dance form to illustrate such a technogenetic body, is aptly akin to what video games are built to do.[139]

2.4.6. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the elasticity of the almost concept

If a player character in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is positioned as perched on a wall by the player, poised and ready to drop down onto an enemy guard for example, the player is shown various ways of dropping onto that guard in a superimposed interface.[140] There will be juxtaposed button prompts for

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[137] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 68.
[138] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 70-71, 76.
[139] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 74-75.
[140] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Strike From Above', 'Black Gate', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

enthralling that guard, to then control them with magic drawn from the ghost inhabiting the player character. A player might also brutalize this guard instead, to scare off any of their nearby comrades. They can also just quickly and quietly kill the guard. These simultaneously shown onscreen prompts present the player with a range of performative techniques available, specific to situations like this. Multiple options to act are available in most other situations of the game as well, diegetically so by dint of the technical capacity and equipment of the player character.

On responding to this one preacceleration, then, by choosing an approach and having the player character jump on that guard in a specific way, the other options disappear from view. They are only replaced with new prompts, for a range of potential actions, once the animation for this current action finishes, with the player character having jumped off the wall they were on, then landed, and having then dealt with the guard in question. An enthralled guard would instead leave the player's magic power charged up, ready to fire magical arrows with their bow, as an example. This also enables sending that enthralled enemy recruit off to disrupt their army's hierarchy, by fighting former comrades, or by sending a death threat to a commander. Loudly brutalizing this same guard would have alerted nearby enemies, scaring most of them off.

However the player acts, their killing the guard eventually attracts others, who might dispassionately investigate, or call for aid and attack the player character when they spot them. That might prompt the player to flee and get back to acting covertly. A player might also just stay put, wait, and prepare for an open fight. The latter would, after significant struggle, render the area safely unguarded for a while. The former would be easier, but demand the player's sustained caution. This opening up, of a breadth of complex options, immediately after landing the blow that a player has committed to, with consequences clearly emerging from that initial action, expresses an elasticity of the almost, as Manning defines it. A range of preaccelerating elements coax a player into action simultaneously, until one action is committed to. Then this action has to land, before new preaccelerations appear in number, instantly, from out of the consequences of their action.

2.4.7. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the relational movement concept

Whenever a player commits to making their player character run past and out of a violent confrontation that's straight ahead of them, in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, other options will disappear offscreen, and into the distance behind the player character.[141] A quicker escape might have been off to the right, over some nearby rocks. A safer and sheltered escape might have been atop a wall to the left.

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[141] 'Black Gate', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

After having ran for a bit, then, the enemy troops following from behind might catch up to the player character, as a consequence of them having taking the most straightforward and vulnerable way out. These kinds of events would force a player to stop and consider the different ways they might deal with such a situation.

The prevalence of relational elements, that prompt each action in any of these situations, was pointed out in the preceding paragraph, with the concepts of preaccleeration and metastable movement. The game seems to move a player to act, and keep moving if a player stays idle. These elements all relate overtly to a discrete player character, inhabiting the constantly visible body at center screen. They are shown to always have a range of techniques on hand, for dealing with each preacceleration, and the player only has to recognize the right tool for the right job. This is an extensive system of relational movement, as Manning defines it. The game even illustrates what Manning observes, that inaction is likely defined less by withdrawing from a situation, and more by preferencing none of the otherwise ongoing preaccelerations, following up on none of them as they pass by.

2.4.8. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the technogenetic body concept

The preaccelerating elements, that invite constant engagement in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, always obviously relate to the one right tool or technique brandished by this game's player character. The clear landscape of relational actions that are viable in a situation, and the clearly outlined abilities of the player character, comprise another animating force, then, that keeps a player engaged and mobilized in a meaningful way. The player character in this game is rendered as a technogenetic body, potent and made familiar to the player, so that they can confidently judge what the game allows them to do. In this, the player is made to experience the player character's often mentioned resolve and self-assuredness in this story, which is what keeps them fighting despite improbable odds.

The player character visibly wears a set of weapons, one for each type of combat encounter they might have to survive.[142] They have their hands clear for finding handholds when climbing.[143] Their hiking boots imply a capacity to traverse rough terrain in any weather. The supply pouches and toolbags that they carry indicate an ability to subsist on food and supplies found in the wild.[144] They wear obvious defensive covering, against attacks and harsh weather, though their clothing is nimble enough to stay mobile for long stretches, but too heavy to go for a swim with. The ghostly apparition and magical runes

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[142] 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[143] 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[144] 'Survival Challenges - Challenge 01', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

they might call on glow when charged and ready for use.[145] Enemies and mounts under the player character's thrall are visibly branded with this magic. And then there are the overtly repetitive, clearly habituated gestures, with curt effectiveness indicating that the player character is not like to fumble or doubt. Sword strikes and parries are executed with the same unceremonial, automatic and powerful motions every time.[146] Arrows are drawn quickly without a wasted motion. The right tools and habits for any of the game's distinct situations are worn visibly, always centred on the screen, by the well prepared and trained body of this player character. All these elastic player actions that the game renders, each rendered as a relational act, drawn from an overtly technically and technologically capable body, create a sense of individual distinction for the player, relative to the game's other actors and larger systems of motion.

2.4.9. Contrasting examples of these concepts in other games

Games can be differentiated in terms of how they convey the elasticity of action potential contracting and expanding when a move is committed to. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* differs, for example, from how player engagement is foregrounded and focalized in *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*.[147] In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, each action taken brings on this seemingly elastic response. When a move is committed to, other options are gradually precluded, while many new lines of action pop up as a move lands. In the point to point climbing sequences of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, that game's action potential emerges more predictably and rigidly.[148] Nothing moves until the player character makes the one diegetically prescribed move. When they perform as prompted in the game's opening section, for example, jumping up from one dead end ledge to another handhold, only then might they move up to higher ground, and then into the building that they are hanging on to. Inside the building, then, guards will always show up to attack the player character, and they have to be defeated to enable moving deeper into the building.[149]

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor's relational movement foregrounds that the player is deploying a discrete technogenetic body for every act, generating their own response to some preaccelerations. This is a displacement expressed as discrete and autonomous on the part of the player, relative to a

[145] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Brand', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Execution', 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[146] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[147] Désilets, P., Mechner, J. (2003), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.
[148] 'Second Scene, Chapter 02 - The Maharaja's Treasure Vaults (2%)', in: Désilets, P., Mechner, J. (2003), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.
[149] 'Final Scene, Chapter 01 - Tutorial (0%)', 'First Scene, Chapter 02 - The Maharaja's Treasure Vaults (2%)', in: Désilets, P., Mechner, J. (2003), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.

dynamic system of preaccelerations. The later stages of the game *Everything* are different in this respect.[150] In *Everything*, a player constantly switches between player character bodies.[151] They retain the same action potential across bodies, with the same set of abilities to enact.[152] The game world in this game also holds no responsive surprises, given a player who is already familiar with their limited performative options. There is little of the sense of being moved by *Everything*'s fictional world. With the player able to inhabit any of the bodies they encounter in the game, animate and inanimate beings of any size, and of any composition, the intent of the game seems to be, then, to have players lose their sense of inhabiting a distinct body, rendered unable to meaningfully differentiate themselves from the world around them, and from other actors. *Everything* narratively expresses this growing awareness that the player's autonomy is fully comparable to that of any other thing, that they are in a sense the same as everything else.[153] The player is not moving a technogenetic body of note, pointedly, and there are no meaningfully distinct displacements they might make.

2.4.10. Summary of findings

In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, the closing of distances between a player and preaccelerating game elements is literalized on screen, as the relational displacement of a discrete player character's body. This character moves in on distinct objects in a simulated environment, and each move they make is depicted as using a specialized technological object or habit. They deal with given categories of objects appropriately and without falter, each time. Each such preacelleration acted upon precludes other lines of action, while completed displacements instantly lead to a breath of new affordances opening up. Again, Manning's terminology seems productive here.

So far I have interpreted *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* as conveying a politics of touch, with preaccelerating game elements inviting action, and with a discrete player character acting on those invitations, by displacing a technogenetic body. The next paragraph takes up Manning's next book, to look at meaningful overarticulations and the extension of movements in this game.[154] This closes the loop of discrete actions leading to more discrete actions.

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[150] 'Everything is Everything - Intertitle Unlocked', in: Di Fede, D., OReilly, D. (2017), *Everything*. Kilkenny: David OReilly.
[151] 'Welcome to Everything - Intertitle Unlocked', in: Di Fede, D., OReilly, D. (2017), *Everything*. Kilkenny: David OReilly.
[152] 'Everything is Everything - Intertitle Unlocked', 'Shell Interface, Help Screen', in: Di Fede, D., OReilly, D. (2017), *Everything*. Kilkenny: David OReilly.
[153] 'Everything is Everything - Intertitle Unlocked', 'You Are Nothing - Achievement Unlocked', in: Di Fede, D., OReilly, D. (2017), *Everything*. Kilkenny: David OReilly.
[154] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 32, 38.
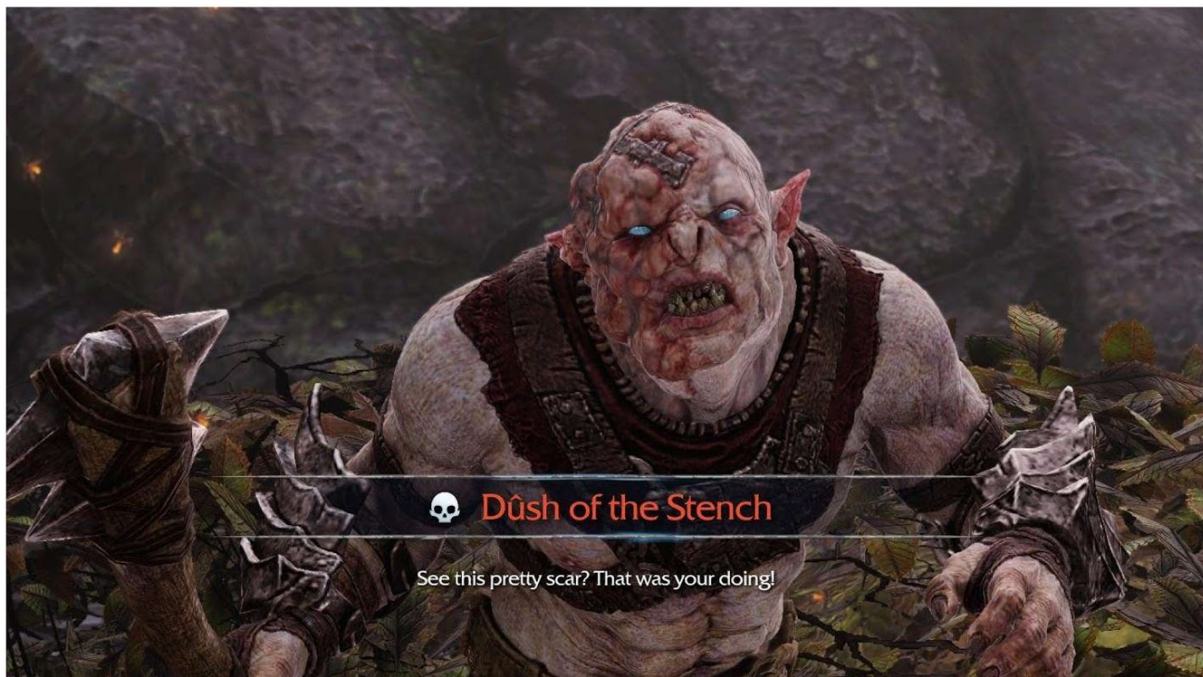
Figure 05 - The top shows a player having just magically teleported near to a soldier, for a surprise kill. Overarticulated poses, exaggerated audiovisual effects, and slowed animations give more space to act on the blue button prompt behind, over the other soldier's head. This prompt enables another teleportation surprise kill. In the bottom image, an enemy commander returns unannounced from near death, for revenge on the player character. They comment on this, implying the technicity of an endless cycle of violence out of the player's control.

2.5.-. Overarticulated movement techniques that imply play's technicity

2.5.1. Paragraph outline

My interpretation of how individuated elements invite play in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, and the preceding interpretation of how a player's responses are individuated, as distinct from what moves them, are supplemented in this paragraph, with two concepts from Erin Manning's third book, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*. Technicity is a concept for how distinct displacements, or the generating of specific movement techniques by a discrete body, can appear informed by a larger technical system, or a technicity.[155] Overarticulation, the other concept, denotes a style of movement that foregrounds technicity, to prevent practiced technique from becoming habit.[156] Overarticulated, a movement is overtly complicated by its performer, or its final moments are prolonged and suspended, so that that movement's technical origins, alternatives, and consequences are all implicated in its practice. Overarticulation imbricates larger structures of movement with the performance of smaller gestures, and it opens landed moves up to subsequent preaccelerations, to in turn instigate new displacements.[157] Both the concepts of overarticulation and technicity are applied to a case study in this paragraph.

2.5.2. General summary of Manning's *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*

In Erin Manning's third philosophy and cultural theory book, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, she starts off analyzing contrasting theories of developmental psychology. To Esther Bick, infants need a sense of being contained, complete, and distinct, in the close care of a parents' household, before they can even make sense of entities or forces influencing them.[158] For her purposes, Manning prefers Daniel Stern's opposite notion, that infants develop a sense of individuality precisely because of their skin and body being a kind of filter, rather than a barrier, as it selectively lets outside forces in, and inner experiences out, but not without filtering or changing these.[159]

Manning goes on to describe dance, as a form of art that exemplifies and investigates such a form of individuation, emerging as the result of larger systems of movement coalescing in personalized interpretations.[160] Dance, from here on, appears in most of Manning's case studies, as she continues to investigate how individuation might appear as a collective process, rather than an entirely discrete one.

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[155] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 32.
[156] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 38.
[157] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 39.
[158] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 1-2.
[159] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 3-5, 8.
[160] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 14-15.

[161] Manning cites the likes of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Gilbert Simondon and Alfred North Whitehead, for existing philosophical discourse on this notion.[162]

Media other than dance are interpreted intermittently. Manning extensively describes the film *Waltz with Bashir*, for example, to interpret how it depicts memory recollection, as informed more by outside forces than by personal intent.[163] Some of Manning's own works of participatory installation art are described, along with experiences of their creation.[164] She describes them as efforts to create a prescriptive performance choreography, that changes as each participant enacts it, and passes it on to others by demonstration.[165] Each participant described or used the prescribed sewing tools and fabrics differently, in these installations of the *Folds to Infinity* project, when dressing themselves or another audience member. *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* closes with chapters on language use by a collective of autistic poets, on how Bracha Ettinger's visual art emulates autistic perception, and on how psychoanalyst Francis Deligny meaningfully mapped the movement patterns of autistic patients.[166] The first of these chapters posits language as a co-compositional tool that actively involves whatever is described.[167] The second sees the affect of love, crucial to autistic experience, in how Ettinger's *Autistwork n2* obscures no element of the creative process that made it.[168] In the third of these closing chapters, Manning describes psychoanalyst Francis Deligny as exhibiting a similar openness, or loving enthusiasm, for autistic perception. He just let his autistic patients wander freely, as maps of their movements helped integrate them in a caring community.[169] In a coda, Manning collates all the preceding, to state how loving enthusiasm, playfully opening oneself up to outside actors and forces, is one way to facilitate the kind of collective individuation that her first chapter saw in Stern's developmental psychology.[170]

2.5.3. Interpretation of the overarticulation concept

These first concepts from *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* close a conceptual loop implied by the preceding two paragraphs. Preaccelerations were taken to lead into discrete technogenetic displacements, which then somehow led to more preaccelerations and sustained motion.[171]

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[161] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: xxii-xxiii.
[162] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 27-30.
[163] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 56-57.
[164] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 110-113, 125.
[165] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 114-119.
[166] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 153-154, 172, 190.
[167] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 155-157.
[168] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 172, 180-183.
[169] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 189-195.
[170] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 211-213, 218.
[171] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 39.

Overarticulation, the first concept for this paragraph, describes how moves can be suspended in their moment of impact, in such a way that a preceding situation, alternatives to this move, and potential future moves, are all foregrounded.[172] Overarticulation implies technical potential, a technicity in Manning's words, that remains unexpressed as a given movement technique is enacted.[173] This is an extended and complicated way of landing discrete moves, that implies how a body always has more techniques to learn and practice, as preaccelerations appear to invite that body to continue acting.

2.5.4. Interpretation of the technicity concept

The notion of technicity adds to Manning's concept of the technogenetic body, or to the practicing of techniques that compose the body as a capable whole.[174] Technicity is the manifest sense that techniques do not only define how a body can express itself in discrete displacements, or how it can play into preaccelerations. Techniques might also imply what else a body can learn to become like, or to become capable of. As an initial example, Manning describes tending a garden in spring, while knowing that one's technical practice here and now, and whatever tools are used, have an extended range of influence. They are determined by what plants have survived the past winter, for example, and by how plants will grow over the next summer, and by the need to prepare for autumn in several months.[175] In gardening, actions always involve some large-scale ecological systems that one's current technical practice has some limited influence over.

Manning cites the choreographer William Forsythe next, to describe how you might also associate technique with technicity, when you creatively base motion techniques on other techniques, or when you combine techniques unconventionally, or when you chain techniques together in odd sequences.[176] As Forsythe is cited explaining, moving one's hand across the body, and then moving one's shoulder and ribcage along, as if it were another hand that clasps the arm to the chest, doubles up movements to make the initial generic motion more expressive, in unconventional ways. This also foregrounds the body's potential to create variations on any habitual movements, to combine movements in creative ways, and to create ways of moving unfamiliar body parts.

Manning briefly describes improvisation, as a practice that fosters such creative juxtapositions, superimpositions, or sequences of movements.[177] She goes on to choreographer José Gil's concept of

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[172] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 38.
[173] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 39.
[174] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 32-33.
[175] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 31-32.
[176] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 34-35.
[177] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 35-37.

overarticulation, as a more pragmatic description of these kinds of allusions to technicity.[178] By overarticulating gestures, you extend and complicate them as a movement lands, in ways that imply a set of influences and movements beyond the one practiced in the moment. The extension of a movement in the landing gives space, for the consequences of that movement to come into focus, as a range of new preaccelerations emerge, with each creative extension of a displaced body. To Manning, overarticulation is the counterpart to preacceleration, which is why I explore the concept at this point in the present thesis.[179] Dance, to Manning, is the art form that most readily juxtaposes chains of movements, or that superimposes gesture on gesture, in this overarticulating way, implicating larger systems of potential movements in every discrete act.

2.5.5. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the overarticulation concept

To make anything happen in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, a player makes very minor gestures, like using one finger to push or hold a button.[180] These gestures are then computer animated and focalized on screen, as the comparatively exaggerated and prolonged gestures of a player character. From the moment a corresponding button is pressed, it takes a while for the exaggerated player character gesture, jumping up to grab a ledge for example, to complete.[181] Such overarticulation, there for each action because of the physical interface of this game, gives time to contemplate the exaggerations of this action's impact, as well as what other ways the player could have gotten their player character up to the same ledge. Holding the modifier button to speed up the player character's movements is one example. Using the character's inhabiting ghost to shoot an arrow up at a guard, and magically teleport to the arrow's impact site, is another example.[182]

Besides the prolonged animation, this act of grabbing a ledge is overarticulated with loud sound effects, of crumbling rock from the brittle wall, and of the shuffling limbs looking for handholds. Exaggerated visual effects, like puffs of dust, trail each movement and mark each impact. Superimposed button prompts and text labels also exaggerate the consequences of actions like these, while they occur. By climbing up to this ledge, the player character might have avoided some guard patrol audibly

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[178] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 38-40.

[179] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 38-39.

[180] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Shell Interface - Options - Controller Mapping', 'Shell Interface - Options - Keyboard & Mouse', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[181] 'Dagger Legends - Clear the Skies', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[182] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Elven Swiftness', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Lethal Shadow Strike', 'Gollum's Story Arc - The One Truth', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

marching in from offscreen, to now be in sight of some guard up there, which can in turn be dealt in multiple ways.[183]

Picking up archeological finds, to learn parts of the fictional history of this game's world, is similarly exaggerated. The camera frame will close in for this action, as special effects evoke the co-inhabiting ghost magically reading an object's past. Audible echoes of this past overtake the normal audio landscape, as an archeological find is held this way.[184] When starting or completing prescribed missions in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, superimposed instructional texts and scoring tables mark the precise occasion, while all the other action is slowed down, and color is drained from the screen.[185] Most of the actions in this game are emphasized in comprehensive ways like this.

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor expresses overarticulation more simply in a lot of cases, with just video playback speedramping techniques, and with characters holding their pose briefly, as an action is landing.[186] Whenever a player teleports over to a soldier, for example, as they use that magical bow and arrow to jump to them, immediately murdering them, the game ramps down its video display speed, from slow motion down to a full stop, before it ramps up to normal speed after the action resolves. In this moment of overarticulation, as the player character performs their gruesome act, the game's camera frame and player character can be controlled at normal speed, to survey the situation. If other guards are moving in, the player might point over to them, then instruct their player character to teleport to one of these soldiers and murder them as well. This chain of teleporting attacks can be prolonged, for as long as the slowed display speed lasts. If one of the nearby enemies has their shield up already, or by chance counters the magical arrow attack, the game ramps down its speed to emphasize the attack chain ending.

In combat, when an incoming attack is blocked by the player, or when a chain of multiple attacks lands, to break an enemy's defense, the game also uses such speedramping for emphasis. This doesn't happen for single sword hits, or attacks against a defending foe, nor when the player character gets hit themselves. In these cases, the involved characters do still emphasize the impact of their actions, by briefly holding the pose at the end of their gesture. The game ramps down to a sustained slow motion when the player character aims their bow and arrow, for as long as the automatically draining charge on it lasts. During speedramping, the player character can perform chains of action without pause or

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[183] 'Dagger Legends - Clear the Skies', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[184] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Artifacts', 'Shell Interface - Map - Artifact Marker', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[185] 'Start Mission Heads-up Display', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[186] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

interruption. This encourages chaining together actions into longer sequences. All this speedramping gives some much needed breathing room during the game's involved and complex combat encounters. It allows a brief window of time for surveying these situations, and to plan for the complicated tasks these encounters put on a player. The camera frame can always be moved at normal speed, orbiting the player character, and button commands for the player character can be queued up, even as they're still resolving current actions.

The brief moments of respite of these speedramping overarticulations also encourage a player to consider their options for each next move. Sequences of actions, or simultaneous combinations, offer enough of an advantage to warrant consideration in these moments. An uninterrupted sequence of sword hits breaks an enemy's guard, for example. The player character kills instantly and quietly, if they are sneaking when made to attack an enemy guard from behind, instead of walking or running. Leaping over a soldier first, in combat, ensures that the player character's next hit lands from an undefended angle. Infusing sword strikes with magic, by fighting long enough without taking a hit, allows simultaneous combinations of attack moves that can instantly kill a target, stun a group of enemies, or set fire to targets from a distance. All manner of complicated chains or combinations of moves are encouraged by their effectiveness. These are facilitated by the game's automatic overarticulations, and those sustained by the player. As such, the game encourages a player to keep learning and exploring their capacities. Movements, especially the complicated and prolonged ones, are extended and exaggerated by *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, in order for new preaccelerations and alternative approaches to become clear.

2.5.6. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the technicity concept

Technicity, in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, implies the extent and limits of a player's reach. A player can tangibly influence the game's fictional world, but they are pushed to follow through on a chosen line of action, before they can switch to trying another approach. For example, in a given combat encounter, only a chain of several attacks, or a sustained enthrallment touch, can break an enemy's guard, to enable the player to defeat them.[187] The specific benefit to a chosen line of action often only appears as an overarticulation plays out, leaving room for the player to consider how other actions could have perhaps led to even better situations. The game prolongs the moment, for instance, when a player's covert action

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[187] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Execution', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Combat Drain', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

causes alarm or discovery, and soldiers move in to inspect.[188] Random patrols will even come investigate, eventually, if a current area is entirely cleared of guards covertly. Enemies will note what precarious situation they find the player character in, in these cases, often mentioning what specific action they think got the player character caught.[189] Even after a temporary success, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* will point to the player's limited capacity to plan ahead, and to how other approaches could have been tried instead, with different results.

The game's simulated recruitment, intermittently, of new soldiers to the enemy's side, is displayed in a kind of tournament bracket shell interface.[190] This recruitment interface makes the limit of a player's influence even clearer. Empty spots in the occupying army's ranks are only briefly empty, until the lines of succession, as visualized, resolve themselves. An eliminated enemy commander eventually just enables other commanders to climb the ranks, growing stronger from fighting for the new position. New challengers to the player's subsistence will always appear. The player's technical attempts, to violently carve out their safe space in enemy territory, inevitably just feed this technicity, of an endlessly revolving cycle of violence. This is emphasized by the highly distinct properties of each commander that appears in the ranks, and by the procedurally assorted and seemingly endless variety of such distinct opponent characters. The game randomly assorts enemy characters from large, clearly delineated sets of potential strengths, weaknesses, weaponry, fears, motivations, visual traits, and styles of speech.[191] Even if a player gains control over this system to some degree, by positioning enthralled soldiers in the ranks of command, unexpected situations will crop up, to show the player that there are always things to learn and experiment with.[192] Defeated commanders might suddenly appear alive and well again, after having seemingly died, now out for vengeance against the player character.[193] Commanders might actively lead a posse to hunt for the player character, instead of staying at their denoted station.[194] Commanders

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[188] 'Durthang West - Stronghold Alarms', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[189] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "These Ghûls are MINE! However You've POISONED them, I will suck it out!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[190] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[191] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[192] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - The Power of the Wraith', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[193] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "See this pretty scar? That was your doing!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[194] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "Have I found you at an [innoportune] time? How unfortunate… for you!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

might suddenly compete for power among themselves, leaving the player out of the loop.[195] The technicity of this dynamic army structure is implicated in all of the player character's constant bids for control over these occupied lands, while at the same time being the clearest indicator of how a player can only ever keep learning and adapting to such larger systems of movement.

Technicity is also constantly expressed, minutely, by the game's inverse kinetics style of visual animation. A player can push the player character to perform a clearly defined action, but then the visual animation for this performance will always be influenced by unpredictably simulated forces in the game's environments. The angle of terrain, or the density of foliage underfoot, for example, influence where a leg moves and how a foot lands.[196] The rippling of worn cloth also differs for each movement, influenced by shifts in the simulated winds and humidity, among other things.[197] Even the mere act of walking a player character about gives a glimpse of technicity, for the player to experiment with. If a rainstorm randomly occurs, or when simulated nighttime arrives, the player character is respectively less audibly or visibly detectable. Systems like this modulate the purpose and effects of a player's most basic actions, in ways that they can only partially predict and control. Such expressions of technicity, in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, most obviously so during overarticulated gestures, sustain a player's engagement. Despite the many repetitions of only slightly variable actions in this game, and despite the cyclical recurrence of many similar situations, there is enough to learn from and adapt to in each discrete event.

Through overarticulation and technicity, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* invites a player to keep exploring its performative possibility space. This aligns with the player character's diegetic drivenness, to persist in their struggle, learning to do so adaptively and with increasing efficiency. Crucially, though, the game never gets easier or less chaotic, regardless of a player's familiarity or creativity. The player character never does more damage with their hits, nor do they become less detectable when sneaking about.[198] Rather, they get augmented with more abilities, and more variations on abilities, which all demand even more active choices from the player.[199] New abilities are never necessarily the better options to act, but just different ones. A part of this game's enticing technicity is always being able, and pushed, to learn more of the multiple ways that an action can be performed and

[195] 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[196] 'Udûn Foothills', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[197] 'The Valley of Udûn - Weather Cycle - Hail', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[198] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities', 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[199] 'Hirgon's Story Arc - The Outcasts', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

landed, modulated or chained to other actions, instead of having newly learned moves render familiar ones moot.

2.5.7. Contrasting examples of these concepts in other games

As a contrast to the preceding, the action in *Kingdom Hearts II* contains none of the freeze frames or speedramping effects, that in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* suspend a player's gestures at the moment of impact.[200] *Kingdom Hearts II* has rounded, smooth, and jittery animation style. In combat, the screen is densely packed with impact effects and animated actors, flying off in all directions.[201] *Kingdom Hearts II*'s numerous magical martial action scenes are conveyed very busily, but with no room for preaccelerations to catch the player's attention, or for the player character's distinct body to stand out, movements all just flow on into one another.

Purposefully overarticulating your own actions also serves little purpose. Moves that can be chained together don't build to a final blow that kills or stuns enemies, or to anything significantly different from just letting each move land on its own. The same goes for complicated modulations of such moves.[202] Enemies in *Kingdom Hearts II* don't gesture in response to a player's hits.[203] A superimposed interface, instead of diegetic animations, displays relative stamina levels of the player character and their opponents.[204] Opponents have strengths and weaknesses, but these don't have to be memorized or adapted to, as any move the player makes against them is effective regardless.[205]

Technique is something intended for comforting habituation in this game, rather than as an indication of technicity to learn and experiment with. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, these same aspects of movement, styled differently, invite a player to be inventive with their limited influence on trying situations, even in the heat of battle. In *Kingdom Hearts II*, a lack of overarticulation conveys simultaneously fluent, hyperkinetic, comfortably playful, and empowering action, to supplement the game's postmodern irreverence of chivalric romance.[206]

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[200] Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[201] 'Roxas in Twilight Town - The Third Day - Station of Serenity', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[202] 'Yen Sid's Tower - Drive Gauge Unlocked', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[203] 'Roxas in Twilight Town - The Third Day - Station of Serenity', 'Jiminy's Journal - Collection - The Nobodies - Dusk', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[204] 'Roxas in Twilight Town - The Third Day - Station of Serenity', 'HUD Interface - Health Gauges', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[205] 'Shell Interface - Abilities - Sora', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.
[206] 'World That Never Was - Proof of Existence - Second Visit', in: Hashimoto, S., Kanemori, Y., Kitase, Y., Nomura, T. (2006), *Kingdom Hearts II*. Tokyo: Square Enix Co., Ltd.

2.5.8. Summary of findings

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor incites a dancing style of movement. It relates most every act to other moving elements. With not all involved elements clear at first, a player is motivated to extend and modulate their displacements, into extended series or more impactful variants. There is always the tension of unaccounted factors appearing suddenly, or some unnoticed technicity that unexpectedly reframes a move, and which influences what follow up is now viable. A player is encouraged to never let movement practices become habitual. The automatic emphasis on overarticulation helps a player realize this in the game. The player's minor control interface gestures are literally extended and complicated by the game's base physical interface, resulting in outsized diegetic gestures performed by a player character on screen. These diegetic gestures, then, are held in their final moments, and even prolonged with video display rate ramping. In these final moments, emergent preaccelerations are emphasized, and most actions afford an extension into longer chains, or modulated versions, of moves. Narratively, this all allows a player to inhabit the player character's stated adaptability in the game's many various situations. The player character's constrained influence on their surroundings, in these prolonged moments of impact, appears all the more clearly as feeding into a perpetual cycle of violence, upheld in this fictional world. The following paragraph returns to Manning's *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, to expand on how these minor gestures in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* appear to say something about its larger systems of movement. With the concept of relationscapes, the next paragraph describes some concrete ways in which individuated motions can add up to inform larger impressions of relational landscapes.[207]

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[207] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 157-159.
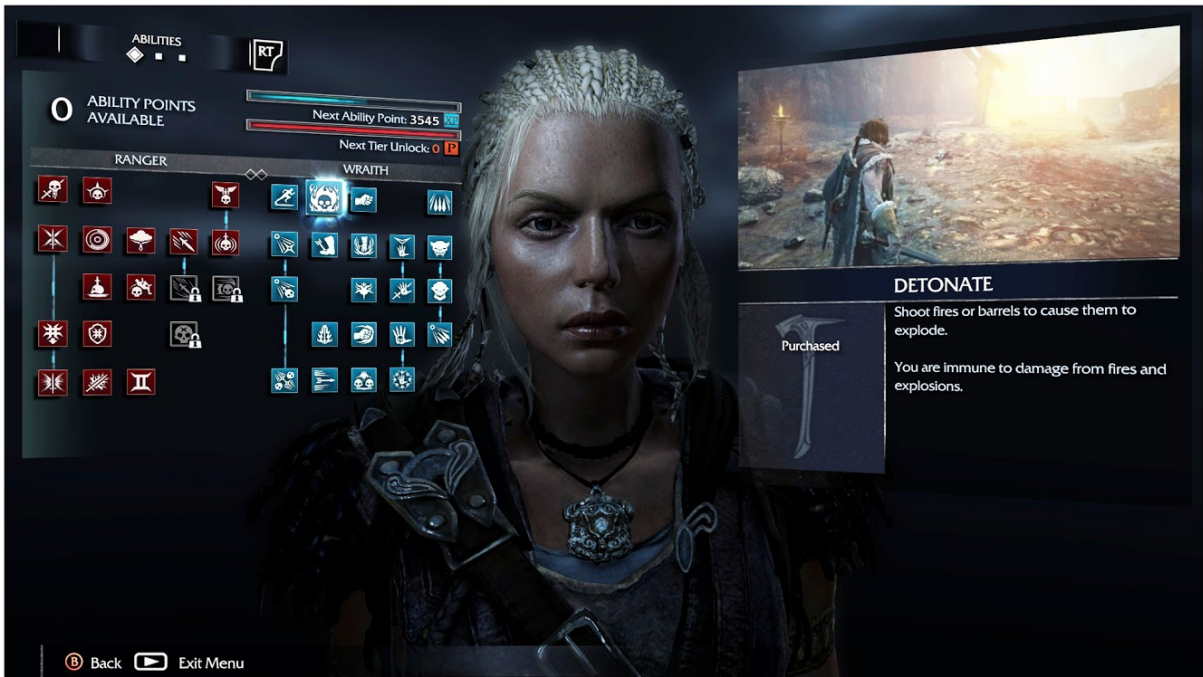
Figure 06 - The top image here shows Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor's lively, densely animated depiction of an occupation army commander, having just been murdered by the player character. A bow and arrow reward token marks the landing site of this impactful act, as the glowing arrows centered on screen delivered the final blow. The bottom image shows extensive-intensive relations in this game foster. This shell interface shows reward tokens for externalized actions being internally exchanged, to the left, for the new player character abilities outlined to the right.

2.6.-. Animated landing sites for play as extensive-intensive relationscapes

2.6.1. Paragraph outline

A last set of concepts from Manning's *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, tested here on an interpretation of meaningful movement systems in video games, are landing sites, animation's dance, the extensive-intensive relation, and relationscapes. They illustrate how individuated gestures and motions, like the ones discussed in the preceding paragraphs, an add up to form an impression of larger, spatiotemporally distributed, systems of movement. Given enough of a shared emphasis, with the aforementioned overt preaccelerations, discrete bodily displacements, and extensive overarticulations, all individuated moving actors in a dance can be clearly seen to move alongside other movers. Together, such a group of cocomposing actors can be seen to chart whatever larger moving system they are all involved in.

Such movers mark concrete landing sites, conceptualizes Manning, as points of environmental impact radiate outward for each of their actions.[208] On a shared and delineated stage, their juxtaposed actions might be at various stages of unfolding, with varying speeds and rhythms, which would give the staging a dance-like and animated aspect. Manning names this an animation's dance.[209] Such a dance can have discrete bodies internalize their surrounding, then externally projecting this acquired understanding, to thereby influence that surrounding, which influences what's there to internalize for a next move. Manning calls this reciprocality, of being moved while shifting some perspectival frame of reference with each move, extensive-intensive relationships.[210] Manning describes relationscapes as having these three aspects to them, as a landscape image appearing from out of a clearly distributed constellation, of discrete and interrelated movers.[211] Movers can seem to mark out their accompanying milieu in this form, and in turn appear influenced by this impression of a movement milieu.

2.6.2. Interpretation of the landing sites concept

Erin Manning concisely develops her concept of landing sites, by interpreting Thierry de Mey's dance film *Rosas danst Rosas*, with theory by the architects Madeline Gins and Shusaku Arakawa.[212] The choreography depicted in this film, by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, can be seen to emphasize landing sites of all kinds, in various distinct ways.[213] The repeating visceral falling motions in the central part of

[208] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 210.
[209] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 115-116.
[210] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 201.
[211] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 170, 183.
[212] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 207-209.
[213] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 211.

the dance, and the pained gestures everytime the four dancers lift themselves up slightly, to then curtly fall flat again, all evoke perceptual landing sites.

Perceptual landing sites can mark not just the physical site of a move's impact, but also the impact of that move on a dancer's body, on their mind and senses, and even on their relation to other dancers.[214] Landing sites can refer to impactful action in the most abstract philosophical sense, to things even being able to have a notable influence in a movement milieu. The dancers in *Rosas danst Rosas* exaggerate physically noticing each of their moves impacting their own bodies and breathing, the stage floor, their resolve to get up again, and their impression of each other.[215]

As they repeat the same sequence of gestures over and over, they vary their speed and rhythm, all together, which draws attention to how the dance addresses an audience, to how it tries to hold an interest. Glances towards the camera frame emphasize this, during one exaggeratedly slow repetition of the main phrase. Situating actions in relation to a passive audience like this, or to the other dancers beside them, and to earlier or later repetitions, each dancer marks dimensionalizing landing sites.[216] The impact of these mark a topology of related elements.

Finally, Manning describes how the cinematographic aspect of this dance film evokes what Arakawa and Gins call landing sites of the imaging kind.[217] Camera movements, framing, and editing, in *Rosas danst Rosas*, all follow closely along with the rhythm and kinetic focal points of the depicted choreography. Sometimes, dancers move into a shot along a direction that the camera frame is already moving in, or a hard cut to a new shot might coincide with a dancer's move landing. The depiction often follows along with the choreography depicted, and it even sometimes leads ahead of the dancers. Uncannily, and offscreen, the cinematographic bodies working to record and depict the dance are dancing along. These are imaging landing sites, of framed displays impacting moving bodies, and reciprocally being impacted by them.

That extended topography of movers, in *Rosas danst Rosas*, extends beyond just dancers performing on a stage.[218] The impact of movements at landing sites extend to uncanny spaces and situations, beyond what the dance can make known. As one move ends, in a perceived sequence of impactful acts, with a range of potential for further action emerging, landing sites mark discrete motions as being part of extended and distributed movement systems.

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[214] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 210.
[215] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 209-210.
[216] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 211.
[217] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 211.
[218] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 212.

2.6.3. Interpretation of the animation's dance concept

Manning's chapter on filmmaker Norman McLaren's animation pieces posits a concept for how discrete movers and minor gestures, displayed together in a delineated space, can give some impression of what larger movement system is shared by all these movers. Erin Manning interprets McLaren's dance film animations this way , and *Pas de deux* most extensively. The latter frames and displays the simultaneity of many discrete movements in dance, both actual and potential.[219]

In *Pas de deux*, as Manning describes, McLaren shows a partner dance of ballet, in only backlit silhouettes that emphasize the dancers' movements, and with intermittent superimposed freeze frames drawing out specific twists and turns in the dance.[220] Short sections of the dance are also displayed in superimposition, as well as mirrored recordings of such sections. Much of the dance seems informed by these superimpositions, with dancers returning to some superimposed poses, for example, or seemingly repeating superimposed gestures. The number of superimposed images, and the duration of their superimposition, increases towards the end of the film, to such a degree that the dancers become indistinguishable from each other, and from their past and future motions.

To Manning, the motion pictures of this dance film show a dance like aspect that is inherent in all motion picture animations.[221] Implied in each frame of animation is always the relational landscape of moving parts, that got these actors moving for the camera and the film's projector. Implied in each frame of animation is also the potential for different motions that could have happened instead of what is shown. Juxtaposing those implied elements within the frame, and on the flattened surface, of a screen, renders a concise display of the relational elements at play in all discrete motions. This is harder to do in staged live dance. Animation's dance, then, is a conception of such a framed motion picture display of relational displacements, of the overarticulation in movements, and of the preaccelerations that inform these movements.[222] Animation in film can show movement as a relational landscape of sorts, a landscape of all these discrete movers informing each single moving body.

2.6.4. Interpretation of the extensive-intensive relation concept

Extensive-intensive relations, to Manning, come from a reciprocality between one's internalization of a sense of agency, as afforded and invited by their environment, and the sense that that environment is being shaped by the exercise of such agency, which influences what further actions the environment

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[219] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 114-116.
[220] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 116-118.
[221] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 113, 117.
[222] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 118.

affords.[223] Some art objects evoke this equally potent and simultaneous invocation of internalization and externalization. Erin Manning sees this in paintings by contemporary indigenous Australian artist Dorothy Napangardi. Napangardi's dot paintings on canvas derive from some of the so-called dreaming rituals of her ancestry.

Those rituals would be performed as minute shuffling step dances, marking the ground with digging sticks at each step.[224] Such dreaming rituals might for example recall and physically retrace local deep histories of long held foraging routes, or sites of cultural influence. Some of Napangardi's dot paintings transcribe extended root systems of ground vegetables, at the site where digging sticks are said to have been invented.[225] Other paintings transcribe how digging sticks would ritually mark geographical shifts in the sand hills there, or mark directional patterns of local rainfall.[226] Yet other paintings express part of an ancient myth from that place, telling of a snake once hit by digging sticks, who would go on to seek vengeance in the guise of a snake-man.[227] The final painting that Manning describes is a visual representation of digging sticks themselves, by gaps in dot patterns made with their use.[228]

All these paintings convey many various historical, geographical, mythological, and instructional representations of the same landscape. The differences between each painting indicates how a single demarcated landscape can relate to its discrete inhabitants in many ways. They convey different affordances that each require a reevaluation of one's agency with regard to that landscape, as well as an evaluation of what other limited interpretations of that same landscape one might make.

Concretely, the paintings show large patterns of interwoven dotted lines, each unique, emphasized with contrasted coloring and brightness. The eye is directed to follow along each line, dot to dot, imitating a digging stick ritual with each minute eye movement.[229] An audience can also move away. This invites looking for larger patterns in a painting, or contemplating what is represented in this and related paintings. As Manning describes it, these framed landscapes move one to perform similar imaginative and physical gestures to the digging stick shuffle step dances that resulted in these paintings. [230] The audience is given a visual script of minor gestures to perform, reflective of a long history of reinterpreting this same landscape over and over. Each reinterpretation informs both further interpretive agency, and how else the landscape might be navigated.

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[223] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 201.
[224] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 187.
[225] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 185-187.
[226] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 192-193.
[227] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 199.
[228] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 203-204.
[229] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 187-188, 193-195.
[230] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 200-201.

Napangardi's paintings are tangibly shared experiences of the repeated ritual act of trying to make sense, from the long and storied history of trivially small steps taken, of one's own experiences of a given landscape, bearing a strangely different but no less viable result each time.[231] This is an expression of what Manning calls an extensive-intensive relation. Internalized notions of agency, of being able to interpret the dot paintings in this case, when put to practice cause the landscape paintings to express new affordances for interpretation. This demands more internalization of one's sense of agency, another reinterpretation of the landscape, and so on.

2.6.5. Interpretation of the relationscape concept

Manning defines the concept of relationscapes with an expanded range of contemporary indigenous Australian paintings. In relationscapes, the expression of landing sites, of animation's dance on lively framed screens, and of intensive-extensive relationships all come together. Dance is implied in these analyses, both by Manning's descriptions of the dance-like craft of these paintings, and in her defining a relationscape as extending beyond the specificity of whatever artistic medium conveys it.[232] The painted transcriptions of dreaming rituals from this chapter evoke topologies of relationality, emerging out of one's highly personal perceptions of framed artifacts.

Like Dorothy Napangardi's aforementioned dot paintings, but in varying styles, these paintings address the cultural and geographical landscapes that informed them, as well as the performances of what painters painted them, and sensations of their audience. Napangardi's large dot paintings are mentioned, and their aforementioned effects and animating maps described, but these are also contrasted against Emily Kngwarreye's more abstract work. The latter uses overlapping color fields, that destabilize a viewer's perception of colors. These paintings, in turn, differ from Kathleen Petyarre's densely packed dot paintings, which seemingly move and quiver before the eyes.[233] The dreaming rituals that these artists intend to evoke are always communal efforts, closely informed by the situation of a given community.[234]

Manning analyzes the more figurative dot painting maps of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri first. These overtly demarcate and frame a landscape, condensing many of its details.[235] Past events and predicted futures are juxtaposed on these maps. Mythological and tangible histories are mapped out next to each other. Potential topologies are depicted next to actual measurements. Tjapaltjarri's maps

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[231] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 204-206.
[232] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 183.
[233] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 153-157.
[234] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 159-160.
[235] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 163-167.

show a landscape that has the viewer consider not just objective reality, but also what potential each landscape holds for further interpretation. As these densely packed dot maps swim before the eyes, the paintings express what Manning termed animation's dance in an earlier chapter.[236]

Comparing these with the more abstract works of Kngwarreye, especially, Manning notes the influence that a differently situated community, and differing expressive rituals, have on similar artistic gestures. Kngwarreye's serial paintings show brightly colored, subtly detailed, and strongly contrasted dots, along with sketched brush strokes.[237] Each painting of a series is a subtle variation on the preceding one. A full series emphasizes how differently the same strokes can land on each canvas. To Manning, each mark on each painting conveys a clearly situated landing site, in the context of other marks and related paintings. These works are more about their different elements interrelating, and about the performativity of juxtaposing brush marks on framed screens, compared to those dreamings expressed as lively dot maps.

Kngwarreye's works, in the context of other indigenous Australian landscape painters, are a clear illustration of the concept of relationscapes.[238] Relationscapes are defined as landscape images, framed and displayed, wherein each elements marks a landing site that impacts its surroundings, and even what is experienced beyond the frame. Each brushstroke directs the gaze to surrounding elements of contrast, shape, and color, but also to the craft of painting and to other variants on this artform. Relationscapes situate these elements in an animated and animating whole. In this case, all these brushstrokes together destabilize color perception and composition. Kngwarreye's paintings start swimming before the eyes, at angles that recall her having danced about to paint them. Knowing the cultural origins of these works, or recognizing their destabilization of one's vision, or comparing them to ordinary landscape paintings and other abstract art styles, evokes extensive-intensive relations.

An audience is made to feel their adapting to the paintings to interpret them. Their interpretation then reframes what those paintings actively seem to do to inform another interpretation. The dancing and animating energy of Kngwarreye's compositions, the visibly impactful landing of each brush stroke, and the extensive-intensive viewing experience, all together make these expressions of relationscapes, or of landscapes that depict actual and potential interrelations.

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[236] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 169-170.
[237] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 171-179.
[238] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 181-183.

2.6.6. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the landing sites concept

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, to briefly reiterate, casts the player as a capable army commander and ranger, possessed by a ghost with magical abilities.[239] Sharing a body, and their drive for violent retribution, these characters enact a solo guerilla war, against a hyperviolent meritocratic army occupying their homeland.[240] Prescribed narrative events, and adaptively emergent situations, have this player character freeing enslaved allies, but only for immediate aid, or to help them flee the land.[241] Otherwise, the player can gather resources and information to prepare, after which they are mainly coaxed into selectively hunting and killing, or magically enthralling, occupation soldiers and commanders of various ranks, while all those enemies are out to hunt the player character in turn.[242]

As preceding paragraphs outlined, the game emphasizes those elements that get a player moving. The physicality and clear affordances of these elements get a player to consider their player character as a technogenetic body, who is distinctly capable, with specialized skills and tools for every game element. Enacted techniques are exaggerated and prolonged, so that new preaccelerations and clear consequences emerge from every action. These three aspects convey a distinct player character, continuously caught up in a larger cycle of violence, as a result of their minor gestures. They have no long term or large scale influence, nor any permanent force of allies. Nevertheless, the player character influences their situation, and the social structure of this enemy society, by performing what Manning calls a politics of touch. The player character is shown to have physical influence and knowledge, extending well beyond their discrete bodily gestures, in specific ways that these following paragraphs interpret more fully. To start, in this paragraph, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is interpreted as composing relationscapes, the outline of which can be gleaned from how it conveys landing sites, animation's dance, and intensive-extensive relations.

Those preaccelerations, displaced technogenetic bodies, and overarticulations of the preceding paragraphs all have an exaggerated and foregrounded impact in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. The game often literally marks the ground of its simulated environments for this. Actors leave dust trails and footstep sounds with each step, explosions leave charred soil, and sites of battle remain littered for a

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[239] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[240] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[241] 'Hirgon's Story Arc - The Outcasts', 'Lithariel's Story Arc - The Rescue', 'Outcast Rescue Missions - The Uprising', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[242] 'Warchief Hunt', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

while, with weaponry and wounded bodies.[243] These are all perceptual landing sites, as Manning defines them, indicating how an action is received by those directly related to it. The site where an enemy commander is killed will be marked more permanently, in various ways.[244] That reflects the relative importance and more extensive impact of hunting and disposing of the enemy's leadership. A magical rune token is left at the physical site where a commander is killed.[245] This stays in place until the player character is made to magically absorb it, with their co-inhabiting ghost. This rune token translates defensive or offensive properties of that murdered commander, into magical properties, which the player can infuse one of their weapons with. This reward system is described in more detail later, as an extensive-intensive relation.

Killed commanders also leave a gap in the shell interface that charts a player's collected knowledge of the occupation army's command structure.[246] This gap implies a temporary respite for the player, at the site where that commander was stationed or patrolling. It also indicates the impending danger of enemy soldiers violently competing for the empty position, or rallying to avenge their former commander.[247] This is a landing site of the dimensionalizing kind, showing how actions affect others over a given distance of space and time. The rippling impact of actions is more clearly evoked by how other actors, in this game's densely populated lands, are often nearby, responding to much of what a player character does. Sneaking about an enemy fortification, guards can be heard discussing distant rumors of the player character.[248] Opposing soldiers are likely to register surprise when ambushed, and an intent to stop the player harming them. If the player character is seen sneaking about, guards will run off, or scream, to alert nearby allies, especially with an alarm bell nearby. Any alerted commanders will send their allies to kill the player character. The trouble of getting discovered teaches the comparative ease of sustaining stealth, or running back into hiding. It might also teach a player to covertly take out as many soldiers as possible before cover is broken. Alerted enemies will go out to search for the player character, if they've gone back to hiding, starting at the last known position of the player character, which is

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[243] 'Bow Legends - The Spirit of Fire', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[244] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Rune Token Markers', 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[245] 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Rune Token Markers', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[246] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[247] 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[248] 'Black Gate', 'Fort Morn', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

marked as a dimensionalizing landing site by a ghostly silhouette.[249] The player will want to avoid this last known position, knowing that enemies are like to gather there. Even if the player takes out guards covertly, their fellows will note the weapon used, at the sight of their dead comrade, and will search for the killer accordingly. Simulated actors in the game also produce and respond to landing sites amongst themselves. In a fight, for example, enemy soldiers wait on each other to strike at the player character, lest they hit each other. A pair of them might on occasion deliberate a simultaneous attack, though, which the player will have to predict and deflect in a specific manner.[250] Crucially, all of these rippling consequences only affect actors nearby, but never any larger or off screen situations. Landing sites are limited in scope and duration, making them easy to read. They indicate how the player character has a chance at fighting this occupying army in a contained and compartmentalized way. The player character never has the entire enemy army sent after them, and the enemy never persists in their hunts for long. As mentioned, though, the enemy army is also never hurt for long by any of the player's efforts.

Landing sites in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* are mostly of the perceptual kind, showing embodied perceptions of impact. This suits the aforementioned focus on a politics of touch in this game. Prolonged sword slash impacts, or how an enemy moves to deflect attacks well before they land, exemplify this embodied physicality of actions, and impacts being felt.[251] Dimensionalizing landing sites appear less, but are more meaningful to a player's scheming. Exemplary are, perhaps, the enemy soldiers that step back in shock, when the player character kills their commander. Some of them will run off scared, while others brandish weapons in anger, but the player is given that brief moment before this, to notice all the nearby soldiers that they have affected.[252] *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* does very little to overtly address its audience, or to foreground how landing sites are imaginatively rendered. So there are no landing sites of the imaging kind to meaningfully speak of here.

2.6.7. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the animation's dance concept
Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor plays up the dance like aspect of its screened animation, as Manning would describe it. In the aforementioned ways, this game displays all actions as impacting on discrete landing sites, with consequences that ripple out to influence more and more of its adaptive actors. At

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[249] 'Dagger Legends - Deathly Whisper', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[250] 'Shell Interface -Appendices - Tutorial: Double Counter', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[251] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Counter', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[252] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

any one time, in this game's busy environments, there are likely to be many simultaneous events occuring in this manner.

While the player is fighting in the foreground, background guard shift replacements might bring more soldiers in to fight.[253] Guards will likely be tormenting slave workers somewhere a ways off, but this perhaps serves to coax the player into freeing these slaves, for aid in a prolonged battle. Wild roaming wolf packs are audible in most environments, always seemingly ready to pounce, and to disrupt whatever goes on near the player character's location.[254] Superimposed interface elements will mark many nearby soldiers of import, especially when vision is augmented with one's inhabiting spectre's magic.[255] Commanders are distinctly marked for the player, when nearby, as are soldiers who can inform on those commanders, as well as guard patrols, captured slaves, and animals.[256]

Preaccelerating elements and events are emphasized with superimposed prompts to respond. Enemies obscured behind walls and such are marked with colored silhouette outlines, when near enough to the player character. Overarticulated impacts are marked with exaggerated special effects and audio cues. Each actor points or gesture audibly and visibly, indicating what they're about to act on, and in which way. Their bodies are always rendered in clear contrast, dark and saturated, against a muddy and starkly lit surround. As mentioned before, surrounding actors will mostly respond when an action influences their behavior. Target pointers convey what nearby enemies notice the player character, flashing warnings indicate incoming attacks, and scrolling statistics and text labels relay nearby action impacts in more detail. Non-player actors, influencing each other, get no superimposed markers, but they audibly and visibly respond to what happens around them. Offscreen elements relevant to a visible event are indicated by superimposed visual indicators, or sound effects. Arrows might point off to the screen's sides, for example.[257]

The full onscreen space is always animated. The outlining of all nearby actors and actions, clearly related to each other, and with clearly distinct degrees to which they've completed an action, are all indicators of an animation's dance. Animated liveliness plays up what action potential, parallel actions, and varying states of impact, are influencing the agency of each actor in the game. The comparability of different actors on screen implies what else each of them can do.

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[253] 'Sword Legends - Into the Pit', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[254] 'Hunting Challenges - Challenge 3 - Caragor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[255] 'Wraith Vision Interface', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[256] 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', 'Heads-up Display', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[257] 'Heads-up Display', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

Diegetically, this all evokes the player character's trained situational awareness, as an experienced wilderness ranger and fighter.[258] The animation's dance implies that the player character constantly reads their immediate environment for things like lines of escape, supply stashes, or ways to oppose their oppressors. The enemy soldiers do not sneak about like this, constantly surveying, and they will not sustain any pursuit of the player character for long, which all fits in with their adhering to duty schedules in a rigid chain of command.

2.6.8. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the extensive-intensive relation concept

The relationship between discrete movers, and the action systems that move them in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor,* is most literally expressed in its scoring system.[259] This system rewards many actors in the game for their interactions with other actors. The score tokens attained this way can be intermittently exchanged for more interaction abilities by the player, for use with their player character. This is diegetically expressed, or a part of the fictional world, as the co-inhabiting ghost becoming more manifest in the player character, as their host body has more experiences in their guerilla war.[260] That manifesting ghost gradually recalls more and more of their own past training, to supplement the player character's own technical skills. Moreover, as an actionable metaphor, this scoring and ability store system also represents the player character getting more resolved to persist in their struggle, despite continuing to encounter resistance from this fictional society occupying their land. Even as the army's ranks are refilled, after another of the player's targeted strikes, the player will still take away some score tokens to represent their experience, to then spend these on training for more ways to continue fighting.

More concretely, intensive-extensive relations appear for the player character in four literal ways. The player character can be made to earn fixed amounts of so-called mirian points, as a reward for completing any of the prescribed or procedurally generated missions in this game, and by picking up collectible tokens such as archeological artifacts.[261] Mirian points can be spent, for fixed prices, to incrementally increase the player character's passive ability. This increases their endurance to enemy attacks, for example, or the amount of magical runes that can be inscribed to empower their weapons. Score points also come in the form of so-called experience points, earned in fixed amounts from

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[258] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - The Messenger', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[259] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities', 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Player Character Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[260] 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Mordor in Flames', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[261] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Missions', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

performing almost any of the actions in the game.[262] Sneaking up and attacking an enemy, or even just jumping off into a full sprint, gains the player character these points, to spend on actively used abilities. Most of the active skills in the game, like leaping on top of an enemy to instantly dispose of them, or the ability to mount and ride roaming wolves, are bought with these score points. As a third form of extensive-intensive relations, killing enemy commanders, or engaging in the procedurally generated missions that involve them, gains the player character so-called power points, to be spent on getting new sets of active abilities to spend the aforementioned experience points on.[263] Finally, occupation army commanders leave behind procedurally generated rune tokens in their wake, when they're murdered.[264] The properties of these depend on the personal attributes and assigned strength rating of these commanders. Rune tokens can be inscribed on the player character's weapons, to strengthen them in various ways. They might make the player character's arrows do corrosive poison damage, or they might make sword strikes recharge a drained supply of magic power, among other things.

Each of these four scoring systems relates to the others, and each motivates their own style of action. Mirian is a reward for goal oriented play, for completing missions and finding collectible items, for example. It allows access to the strongest weapon abilities, or to additional rune inscription slots. Experience points motivate a diverse and dynamic style of play, to test out which combinations of actions might provide the greater point reward.

Besides these overt rewards for the player character, there is also a score system for enemy characters.[265] Each gains a strength rating, and new procedurally selected defensive or offensive abilities, each time any of them kills or scares off the player character, and each time they defeat a rival within their own army. When the player character is automatically revived, to continue a magically extended life after each death, the enemy army hierarchy is shown, having rearranged itself according to ongoing infighting, and according to which soldiers have attained new strength ratings since the player character's last death.

These five interlinked scoring systems literalize a reciprocal internalization and externalization called for by many aspects of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Every time the player judges their player character's capacity to sneak by a guard patrol, for example, they call on internalized knowledge of the

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[262] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Missions', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[263] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Missions', 'Nemesis Mission System - Power Struggles', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[264] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Rune Token Markers', 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[265] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Player Character Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

games actors and environments, enacting that knowledge for the game to respond to in kind.[266] Each time an arrow is shot off, the player has to account for the limited number of arrows that the player character currently carries. On the longer term, the player is like to mentally model, and act on, their judgments of where each enemy commander is stationed or patrolling.[267] In encountering an enemy soldier of any rank, the player has to weigh the player character's current skillset and brandished weaponry against visible equipment on the enemy, as well as the randomly assigned personal traits that opponent has.

2.6.9. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the relationscape concept

As in Manning's interpretation of contemporary indigenous Australian paintings, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* seems to render relationscapes, as these experiential forms that can even be seen to transcend the specific confines of its medium. A player's mental modelling and adaptive play is expressly needed to make sense of the larger systems of interrelated elements in this game. With this, the game seems to extend beyond its screened confines, incorporating some wider experience of agency.

This experience of a relationscape seems to derive from the aforementioned exaggerated impacts of player actions, and from how various actors visibly co-compose each on screen event, and from the extensive-intensive relations that are set up with reward systems and complex adaptive events. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* renders this dynamic and adaptive image, of a landscape of interrelated and reactive movers, all discrete physical entities influencing one another. Actions are depicted as having distinct impacts. Actions appear more lively and animated, by being juxtaposed with other actions, shown at various stages of being performed. Moreover, discrete actors constantly seem to internalize events and movers, to then externalize this with adapted ways of responding to situations.

This is focalized through the body of a player character with limited reach and influence on this fictional world. That gives a limited sense of these larger movement systems, coaxed out by minor gestures, so the player is encouraged to mentally model offscreen events that might become relevant in some situation. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* paints this image of a large and dynamically arranged composition, which is the fictional representation of a hyperviolent survivalist meritocracy, held together by the discrete physical bodies inhabiting it, each seeking to assert influence over others. The player's discrete player character is continuously involved in those assertive interactions, co-composing the game's relationscape. Enemy commanders and soldiers never mention any larger army structures or

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[266] 'Dagger Legends - The Wraith', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[267] 'Warchief Hunt', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

military strategies governing them.[268] They mostly mention events and actors physically near to them. The image of a larger invading society comes about, then, from enemy soldiers proclaiming their intent to overthrow or ally with fellow soldiers, for example, or from who they are able to command, or from whether they recognize the player character and express an inclination to hunt for them. As commanders command nearby troops, or as recognizable soldiers confront the player repeatedly, there arises a sense that these actors are part of some larger organization, and a larger system of events, which the player can only indirectly perceive and influence.

2.6.10. Contrasting examples of these concepts in other games

The Graveyard is a concise video game with very few landing sites of note, which shows the concept can at least distinguish games meaningfully.[269] In *The Graveyard*, the player can either have their player character stand stationary, or have them hobble along a straight gravel cemetery path. The character starts halfway down this path, and can be walked over to a bench at the far end, where they'll then automatically sit down. After this, the game either closes automatically, after the player character slumps down and passes away, while an end credits sequence plays out, or the player character gets up again and has to be walked back for the game to then close automatically. Other than the trailing camera frame, no game elements noticeably respond to the player character's movements. They leave no footprints, nor do they get tired or fitter by moving, and no other entities inhabit the graveyard. Moreover, as mentioned, the player's actions have no effect on how the game resolves. *The Graveyard* stages a dispassionate and contemplative performance. The player inhabits a character disconnected from any movement milieu. By contrast, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* renders physically impactful landing sites, to overtly involve its player character.

The video game *Braid* has some sections where its screened motion pictures expressly have very little of a dance-like or animated aspect that can be observed in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*.[270] In these sections of *Braid*, the player character can move left or right across the landscapes on screen, and these movements respectively rewind or forward a fully predictable and controlled flow of time, along the left to right span of each landscape.[271] All on screen elements move to set patterns in these sections, and respond predictably when the player character moves near or touches them. These landscape sections have to be navigated from the left to the right end, while forwarding, manipulating, and

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[268] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'The Black Captain', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[269] Harvey, A., Samyn, M. (2008), *The Graveyard*. Ghent: Tale of Tales.
[270] Barrett, S., Blow, J., McMillen, E. (2008), *Braid*. San Francisco: Number None.
[271] '4. Time and Place, The Pit', '4. Time and Place, Jumpman', in: Barrett, S., Blow, J., McMillen, E. (2008), *Braid*. San Francisco: Number None.

rewinding the depicted causal structure at the right junctures, so that the player character can pass all events in their path unscathed.

The framed and screened animations here are not dancing with much potential. Every actor in these sections moves fully predictably, only animated by the player character moving left or right, and their movements only matter in relation to that player character. The player character's motions leave little lasting impact, nor do environments respond much to them. *Braid* seems intent on rendering a highly focalized narrative with a contemplative style, and tells of a player character dispassionately moving through their own mental spaces, actionably contemplating the properties of time and memory. [272] The aforementioned sections, specifically, are about being able to fully manipulate the flow of events in memory. The grounded, responsive dynamism of animated events in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, and that game's tale of precarious survival and constant assault, stand in stark contrast to this.

In *Samurai Lantern*, the player is presented with the simple task of jumping and running their player character about, getting to each of the lanterns in a given on screen space, as they pop up. [273] The gradually accumulating enemy characters, despondently floating onto the screen, each have to be slashed down, lest the player character touch them and reset the game. This is the only way to respond to opponents in this game. They don't adapt to the player character's presence. Only the lanterns one gathers indicate progress. A fixed number of lanterns open the door to the next of this game's three stages. [274]

This fixed and unresponsive movement milieu is a contrast to *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*'s prolific intensive-extensive relations. *Samurai Lantern*'s player character doesn't meaningfully internalize or externalize any action potential in their given milieu. There are only ever those few actions available to them, and only ever the same parade of uncaring opponents to avoid or stop. As a result, the game is quick to learn, and mastering it means little. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* presents a comparatively prolonged learning process, and more means for creative player expression. *Samurai Lantern* aptly has a more toy-like presentation, as something to lightly engage with from time to time, briefly. It has simple computer generated sounds and music, and low fidelity pixel sprite animations. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is comparatively more prolonged, complex, and systemically engaging. The player is aptly cast as a distinct and complicated character, meaningfully interacting in disparate adaptive ways, with a dense and expansive system of movements.

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[272] '2. Time and Forgiveness, Prologue room', '4. Time and Place, Prologue room', in: Barrett, S., Blow, J., McMillen, E. (2008), *Braid*. San Francisco: Number None.
[273] 'Stage 1', in: s.n. (2016), *Samurai Lantern*. s.l.: AdventureBit.
[274] 'Stage 2', in: s.n. (2016), *Samurai Lantern*. s.l.: AdventureBit.

All three counterexamples of this paragraph don't realize much of a sense of being involved in a relationscape, as Manning would describe it, either by a lack of overt landing sites, a lack of animation dancing with potentiality, or a lack of intensive-extensive relationships. Rather than a landscape packed with autonomous actors relating to one another, *The Graveyard* and *Braid* render more dispassionate landscapes, to supplement their introspective player characters.[275] *Samurai Lantern* exemplifies those video games that put less of an emphasis on systemic narratives or meaningful interactions, which instead demand immediate mastery and convey a transient player influence.[276]

2.6.11. Summary of findings

There's many acts in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* that mark the site of their actualization as overt landing sites of a kind, or as an enticing point of departure for whatever subsequent move is chosen. The mutually reciprocal involvement of externalizing and internalizing actions is also literalized in at least some of the interfaces for this game, involving the player in tangible extensive-intensive relations. Travel shortcuts, for example, are always near to busy military sites, so a player is like to consider when they might need the easy infiltration or quick exit afforded by shortcuts. Scared soldiers might alert their fellows, to then return in force to where they were routed. This trains a player to internalize what soldiers ran off after a fight, and to where, as they count the time they have for freely exploring. Added to this are the literal score token rewards gained for each action taken, to be internally spent on attaining new abilities for the player character to act out with. Being a video game, which is a screened form of the medium, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*'s manifold movements and movers are animated in clear juxtaposition and interrelation. That multiple actors are visibly in various states of acting, at all times, on a single flat and framed screen, makes for an animating experience, dancing with visible interrelatedness and potency. The player's small physical gestures are transcribed as outsized player character gestures on this screen, and all elements of each situation are informatively distributed in predictably organized displays.

Video games, like those Indigenous Australian ritual movements transcribed in paint, may cumulatively form enticing relationscapes out of interrelated minor gestures. This requires that they are animated in a dance-like manner, teeming with juxtaposed action potentials, with emphasis on the impacts of displayed actions, as they involve their audience in extensive-intensive relations. The preaccelerating, technogenetically embodied, and overarticulated constellations of movers in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* map out such a landscape image of a relational movement milieu.

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[275] Harvey, A., Samyn, M. (2008), *The Graveyard*. Ghent: Tale of Tales., Barrett, S., Blow, J., McMillen, E. (2008), *Braid*. San Francisco: Number None.
[276] s.n. (2016), *Samurai Lantern*. s.l.: AdventureBit.

The final three paragraphs of this chapter take up a third book by Erin Manning, to examine other ways in which small embodied movers can seem to imply the larger movement systems that involve them. I first practice a concept for the seeming opposite of what this paragraph dealt with, namely the choreographic proposition. This concept alludes to how a mover can derive a unique identity, just by relating to a larger movement system.[277]

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[277] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 14.

Figure 07 - These disparate but comparable displays of character traits in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor imply how all actors appear different by how they have appropriated some shared choreographic proposal of action possibilities. The top left shows an encounter with a sword wielding soldier akin to the player, while the top right image shows an enemy soldier who has specialized in wielding a bow. The bottom left shows a wolf like creature sharing the player's ability to scale any wall, while the bottom right shows the kind of interface screen by which all these actors seem to have specialized themselves in some way, spending score tokens to improve personal traits.

2.7.-. Total movement as choreographically proposing player individuation

2.7.1. Paragraph outline

In *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, Erin Manning extensively theorizes how no discrete body emerges in isolation, nor does it only appear as it starts relating to outside reality.[278] The notion of choreographic propositions is used here, in contrast to Manning's earlier relationscape concept, to consider individuation, and the appearance of discrete bodily movers, as an emergent property of distributed movement systems. We each differentiate ourselves, by how we experience outside forces delineating our sphere of bodily influence, marking the limits of our skin and limbs, while being marked by our distinctive acting out.[279]

There are three terms by Manning that would clarify this notion, which I will outline and experiment with in this paragraph. The notion of absolute movement explains some of how these interpretable movement systems become apparent, the appropriation of which aids our individuation. The notion of choreographic objects explains why even mechanical things like video games can be seen as intelligently and adaptively informing individual movers. Both these concepts clarify the choreographic proposition concept, or the notion that we can appear distinct, through how we are influenced by a larger outside movement system. The latter concept is extensively applied to a case study in this paragraph.

First, Manning posits absolute movement, or total movement, as a term for movement in a philosophically most ubiquitous and general sense. Dance, to Manning, exemplifies how we relate to movement in so general a sense, with discrete personalized gestures derived from what instructive patterns we each see in it.[280] This appearance of discrete actors, expressing autonomy by interpreting what they see larger systems of movement affording them, this points to what Manning next defines as a choreographic proposition.[281]

The word proposition, in this context, implies how all choreographies seem open to personal interpretation, as acted on by distinct movers, and seen to derive from absolute movement in some sense. If such choreographies were writ in stone, executed perfectly every time, then their execution by discrete actors would not be distinctly meaningful. To Manning, choreographic propositions don't have to be literal dance choreographies, conveyed by some practiced choreographer or fixed script.

Manning's concept of the choreographic object gets at how most anything can have a choreographic influence.[282] For my purposes, then, even a video game can imbue a choreographic

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[278] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 11-12.
[279] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 89-90.
[280] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 13-15.
[281] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 87-90.
[282] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 91-93.

proposition, to aid in individuation. A video game in play, as interpreted in this paragraph, can convey proposals for movement through its physical properties, and as a player engages with it, rather than needing to preface itself with a rulebook or a delineated script.

2.7.2. Interpretation of the absolute movement concept

In *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, Erin Manning starts her extensive conception of choreographic propositions with a general theoretical proposition. All distinctly embodied movements, to her, can seem an emergent property of the philosophically most generalizable and abstract capacity for movement.[283] All things can and do move, all the time, at different speeds and with different relative rhythms.

Dance, to Manning, is a style of movement that shows how things can still appear different from one another, given this philosophical world of total movement. Manning cites philosopher Jose Gil's notion of total movement for this, and Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's thoughts on absolute movement.[284] If everything can always be imagined to be moving, transient and fleeting, then bodies that appear distinct have to have moved in a way that distinguishes them, from other movers, and from the general movement systems that they all share in.

Dance, as a staged and overtly mediative style of movement, exemplifies this form of individuation, to Manning.[285] Dance is the bodily and mobile composition of an extrusion, a distinct and personalized interpretation, that overtly emerges from out of mobility in some seemingly absolute sense. When a dancer walks across their empty stage normally, we might see them as moving like we would on a sidewalk outside. There is a noticeably shared capacity for this expression of bodily movement, bipedally, moving across flat surfaces. More generally, this dancer is recognizable as a discrete mover, merely as the result of them moving against a static stage background, and relative to an inert audience. Another dancer might put a skip in their step, on this same stage, twirling on their feet halfway across. This more obviously artificial dancer can be seen to explore what other techniques of movement are afforded, with a similar body, in this same stage arrangement, for this same audience to identify with. What differentiates these dancers is less easily conceived of with Manning's concept of the relationscape.[286] They appear different more by how they each relate to a shared capacity for movement, than by how they equally mark out their shared space.

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[283] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 13-15.
[284] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 13.
[285] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 14-15.
[286] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 170, 183.

2.7.3. Interpretation of the choreographic proposition concept

In a subsequent chapter, Manning takes to several choreographers and theorists, theorizing the notion of choreography, to further specify this individuation that she sees occuring, when movers differentiate themselves by enacting a shared movement system.[287] Choreography, to these various theorists and practitioners, is the organization of a system of movement, each enactment of which is unique.[288] There are always too many elements at play in any specific performance, with no way to fully organize and predict them all. Each enactment of a choreography also expresses what all potential enactments of it share, as well as some relation it shares with all choreographies, to movement in the imaginable absolute. Moreover, for any situation, some choreography can be imagined to underlie it.

A choreography, as a selective expression of total movement, with potential for several varied enactments, can be thought of as a freely interpretable proposition, for discrete actors to act on at their behest.[289] As the influential choreographer William Forsythe is cited explaining, as part of his practice sessions, no choreography can ever be specific enough to completely control every movement of every staged dancer.[290] All choreographies should be specific enough, however, for dancers to feel like they're each individually addressed by them. Any choreography, as a result, becomes an open proposition of sorts, addressed to those actors who notice that they can use it to individuate themselves.

Manning cites the philosopher Whitehead, the choreographer Forsythe, and the dancer Nik Haffner, to further specify temporal aspects of a choreography.[291] A shared choreography allows dancers to define themselves, with expressions of relatively differing speeds, of collective rhythms of movement, and of marked durations for each move, as well as for the dance as a whole. In each move, past habits and technical experience recur, as current affordances point to future action potentials. Forsythe is cited, instructing his dancers to see their opening gesture as not just the start of movement, but as an extension of the quietness on stage before, modulated into a temporary burst of speed and relative dynamism, inevitably slowed down upon landing a move, to a shared slowness before some next move or phrase is performed. Forsythe is also described as playing with his dancers' perception of present movement, as they're instructed to repeat another's past actions from memory.[292]

Choreographies like this, to Manning, are overtly propositional, in a way that all choreographies share.[293] A choreography asks dancers to individuate themselves by how they enact it, and by how they

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[287] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 75-76.
[288] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 75.
[289] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 76-78.
[290] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 77.
[291] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 79-83.
[292] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 86.
[293] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 87-90.

see total movement selectively reflected in it. The individuality of dancers appears by how each expresses some perceived choreography, or some recognizable system of movement that they take part in. These choreographic propositions, by which discrete movers differentiate themselves, are always notably selections from out of an absolute capacity for movement.

We don't all always move indistinctly. Instead, each of us recognizes the other as a discrete mover. This means that something concrete is open to interpretation, between absolute movement and individuated movers. This something, whether or not a literal choreographer and instruction is involved, can always be conceived of as a choreographic proposition of some kind.[294]

2.7.4. Interpretation of the choreographic object concept

Throughout a third chapter of this same book, Manning extends her definition of the choreographic proposition, to show how it conceivably includes not just some imagined human choreographer and concrete instruction. A choreographic proposition can even come from conventionally inanimate physical objects, like video games.[295] As examples, Manning describes William Forsythe's stagings, and theory, of choreographic objects.

The layout of a living room, or the setup of a stage decor, can be seen as an object in itself, that carries in its form and substance some proposition for where to move and how.[296] These often go unnoticed, inhuman and inanimate as they are, but they can nevertheless be seen as organizing forces, the distinct expressions of which make discrete movers identifiable. A young kid might distinguish themselves by nimbly climbing the furniture. Adults, to whom a living room expresses their ownership, might act on the kitchen's clear ability to produce meals. First-time guests would maybe look for where to quietly seat themselves, with non-threatening manner.

The choreographic objects that Forsythe has staged, and written about, are more overt in their bounding limits and stylistic instructions, as they proposition whatever mover chooses to engage with them. Forsythe's bouncing castle, *White Bouncy Castle*, inanimate as this object is perceived to be, and open as it is to any participant, it was intended to foreground choreography as something that can exist on its own, outside of the individual expressions that may follow from it.[297] The walls and floor of this *White Bouncy Castle* are notably soft and indirect boundary statements. While inside it, you would have to experimentally adjust, and practice with, its parameters for movement. Its tensile strength, and how it reciprocates a mover's every kinetic impact by pushing back, these are obvious propositions for how to

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[294] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 89-90.
[295] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 91-93.
[296] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 91-92.
[297] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 93-95.

move, choreographically. The bouncing castle presents itself as impersonal, as what we would take to be an inanimate object, and it's staged as a fixed, immutable environment.

For Manning, such choreographic objects show most concretely that choreographic propositions can be seen in all situations, as some interpretable aspect of total movement, which individuals play into for individuating themselves, and for distinguishing amongst themselves.[298] The loosely scattered, moveable mirror maze of *The Defenders, part 2* is cited as another example.[299] The free floating, obtrusive balloon cloud of *Scattered Crowd* is another.[300] All manner of objects might be arranged as a movement milieu in this way, to seemingly express choreographic propositions for whomever would playfully engage with them.

A choreographic object invites dance-like and conscious mobile engagement, which distinguishes anyone who acts on this. These objects exemplify how a shared choreography might appear to inform any kind of collective action, by which individual members distinguish themselves. In any situation where several actors seem to share a capacity for movement, in the abstract sense, a choreographic proposition is a way to explain in detail how each actor seems distinct. These propositions can even be seen to come from inanimate objects. The personal interpretation of choreographic propositions, whether from inanimate objects or from human choreographers, is how discrete movers can distinguish themselves, how they distinguish between themselves, and how they distinguish themselves in a moving universe, by each mover's unique expressions of the choreographies that they see themselves as partaking of.[301]

2.7.5. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the choreographic proposition concept

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, as a choreographic object, stages propositional structures of movement that are open to interpretation. These propositions are complex and unpredictable enough, filled with just enough seeming autonomy and distinct actors, to appear derived from movement in some larger or absolute sense, instead of from fixed and predictable computational constraints. Actors in this game do not just encounter each other, interacting one clear way each time. At any one time, they interact through too many large systems of movement to keep track of.

An actor might be seen to engage in complex combat choreographies with the player character, just after an equally complex but distinct practice of searching for the player character, or after a chase across the landscape.[302] This player character might have initiated the engagement with their own

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[298] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 98.
[299] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 94-95.
[300] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 98.
[301] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 98.
[302] 'Dagger Legends - Deathly Whisper', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

complicated practice of covertly scouting an enemy fortress, while creating distractions and lures, to single out and stealthily strike at this one enemy. In any one situation, many different systems of movement are simultaneously enacted, or of influence. Moreover, everything the player can do, other actors in the game will be seen doing as well. This even includes the multi-staged long term lines of action, like hunting down army commanders to increase social standing, or earning and spending reward tokens to attain new abilities.[303]

All the player's motions just emphasize some personal choreographic proposition, interpreted from out of those indistinguishable absolute movement systems that all actor seem to share in. This makes it seem like the player character, and other actors, are individuals by dint of moving within and through this larger system of motion alongside distinct others. Other actors are shown to have all taken their cues for movement from a similar choreography, in some way, within the same system of absolute movement. Most clearly, each individual mover in this game, most clearly those with the player character's humanoid type body, but animal and mechanical entities as well, are defined in large part by how they've each selectively appropriated the game's choreography differently.[304]

This shared choreography can be shown to span from the processes governing physical appearance, to personality and physical capability, to equipment and active engagement with other actors. There is the clear sense that a player may, to a large degree, be equally matched by each of these actors that they share a landscape with, and are outnumbered by, in terms of what they can do and plan. This reinforces the physicality and groundedness of action that I interpreted in an earlier paragraph.

Moving the player character about in the environment, the player might hear occupation guard patrols mention that they heard something moving nearby, before turning around to come investigate the player character's previous position.[305] If a player approaches enemies openly and from the front, they will be seen and pointed at, and from believable distances. Sensory capacities like sight or hearing are similarly hampered, for both player and opponent characters, by the effects of noisome weather, and each time day shifts to night.

As noted in another paragraph, other actors in the game also have convincingly long memories of what the player might have done near to them prior. In the immediate action, enemies will search for a hidden player character at the spot where they were last seen, and reinforcements will be called in at

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[303] 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[304] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity - Page 2', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[305] 'Dagger Legends - The Wrath', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

the place where they'd last made a victim.[306] Over a longer span, returning to the site of an assault the player had abandoned before, perhaps, the local army branch can be seen to have bolstered or replenished their guard patrols and stationed forces, and local commanders might mockingly take note of precisely how the player failed to defeat them last.[307] If nobody is left alive at these sites, or left to escape, there is no such mention of the player's past actions if they return later.

All these actors, the player character included, also share a capacity for stringing together sword or arrow strikes, and shielding actions.[308] They also share a capacity for running around and scaling walls, when chasing each other. The digitally simulated actors in this game even share the player's capacity to actively seek out opposition, to raise their social standing by going out hunting their betters.[309] The way each action in the game is scored, with these scores offering a choice of sensory capacities and physical abilities to attain for oneself, is also something all humanoid actors share. As base enemy soldiers raise themselves up each rank of command, they can each be seen to gain distinctive improvements to their personal agency. Things like poison weaponry, a personal bodyguard, or a special awareness and resistance to covert attacks.

The player character seems most distinct from the enemy army by their capacity for stealth, and their ability to slip into tight spaces and escape at full sprint.[310] The player has the added ability to land magical attacks that kill instantly, or that stun large groups, and they can pick up weapon and ability tokens from the environment.[311] While this distinguishes them from the occupying army, the game overtly shows freed slaves picking up weapons before they start attacking.[312] The giant ape-like Graug monsters, guarding their territories, are shown to stun large groups and to instantly kill both player

[306] 'Dagger Legends - Deathly Whisper', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[307] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "These Ghûls are MINE! However You've POISONED them, I will suck it out!"', 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "See this pretty scar? That was your doing!"', 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "Have I found you at an [innoportune] time? How unfortunate… for you!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[308] 'Sword Legends - Into the Pit', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[309] 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Player Character Killed', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', , in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[310] 'Dagger Legends', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[311] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Execution', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Wraith Flash', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Combat Drain', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Fire Arrow', 'Shell Interface, Map Screen - Rune Token Marker', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[312] 'Outcast Rescue Missions - The Uprising', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

character and enemy soldiers alike, be they caught in certain of their attacks.[313] Large groups of rat-like Ghûl monsters might be seen to suddenly pop out of the ground at night, surprising enemy patrols, like the player would, with covert strikes.[314] Packs of free roaming wolf-like Caragor can be seen to navigate the environment as nimbly as the player character as well.[315]

The only thing that really distinguishes the player from all of the game's simulated actors, it seems, is the player's ability to adapt and pursue different styles of engagement more freely. Other actors switch weapons and behaviors far less frequently than the player. Archers will turn to swords when attacked up close, and worn down opponents do suddenly choose to flee or call aid sometimes, but less nimbly so than the player can. The way members in large groups of similar opponents are each carrying different weapons, though, reacting to the player differently regardless if they are approached the same, this does convincingly create the sense that all these actors can adapt their behaviors and plan for the player's diverse capacity to assault their fortifications. Just as enemy soldiers can intermittently be seen posted as archers, or patrolling the land in search of the player, commanding others or summoning reinforcements, the player character can in given situations choose to take on all these differing roles. The player, though, can switch between styles of acting at every whim.

All the numerous enemy soldiers have a physical appearance, equipment and armor set that seem unique to them, procedurally assorted from out a seemingly endless range of highly distinctive variants.[316] Skin colors can be anything, from white to green, to bright yellow, purplish and stark black. Each soldier in a group might wear anything, from helmets to broken chest guards, with a big axe in each hand or maybe just one small chipped sword. In encountering the player character, those equipped with heavy armors, shields and swords are more like to move closer in, while archers would stay at range. Enemy soldiers even each have a distinctive voice, register and idiom, to go along with the personality traits that each has assigned to them. One soldier might be a shrill poet only talking in rhyme, while another might only express themselves in deep rumbling grunts. Each of these soldiers will have specific personality traits, causing them to go into a violent frenzy, perhaps when wild animals are nearby, or causing them to run away from fires, or to be unphased by the player character's magical attacks. Enemy soldiers might even retain and mention scars, from having fought the player character before, or having

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[313] 'Hunting Challenges - Challenge 7 - Graug', 'Torvin's Story Arc - Hunting Partners', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[314] 'Hirgon's Story Arc - The Monument', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[315] 'Sword Legends - The Fell Beast', 'Hunting Challenges - Challenge 3 - Caragor', 'Torvin's Story Arc - Big Game', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[316] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge tower Markers - Advance Time', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

fought a rival commander.[317] In terms of how characters look and express themselves, then, the game most overtly displays discrete actors being distinct on a shared basis, as part of a shared system of dynamic processes. This distinction is apparent even before the player engages them actively.

This wide sharing of the game's choreographic propositions, across so complex and multifaceted a range of systems, such that a comprehensive choreography can't at any point be held in mind while acting, this makes every actor in the game seem like they're actively and personally expressing a way of interpreting their capabilities. Their capabilities seem selectively interpreted by each of them, from out of some absolute system of interrelated motion. This renders each actor in the game as an equally capable and intentional actor, capable of having responded to the game's simulated environments in all of the ways that the player might have.

Every time an actor distinguishes themselves, then, they seem to do so in a manner that all other actors might relate to, by dint of how they themselves can act. The high measure, in which each actor in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is distinct from all others, seems in large part a result of the many degrees of freedom, that this game's choreographic proposition has them all share. Few games sport simulated actors made as equal to the player as this game does, and fewer games have actors that act so distinct from one another as a result.

2.7.6. Contrasting examples of this concept in other games

Counterexamples, then, are those games wherein the player character's actions do not overtly come from a choreographic slice of absolute movement, that is shared between all actors and, being a propositional choreography, is autonomously interpreted by each of these actors. In the video game *Bayonetta*, the player character has to repeatedly fight off angels from another sphere. These come to stop her unwittingly using inherited magic, to reinstate the matriarchal aspect of their imprisoned deity. [318] Being from another plane of existence altogether, rather than brutally sharing the land like in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, it seems apt that many various types of opposing actors in *Bayonetta* seem to follow their own rules of movement and action, which leaves a player struggling to prove a match for them.

For example, a player often has to awkwardly lure, or force, flying or floating enemy types down to their player character's mostly landlocked body.[319] These cases suddenly make the player character's

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[317] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "See this pretty scar? That was your doing!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[318] 'Prologue - The Vestibule', 'Chapter I - The Angel's Metropolis, Verse 1', 'Epilogue - Requiem', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta*. Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.
[319] 'Chapter II - Vigrid, City of Déjà Vu, Verse 2', 'Chapter V - The Lost Holy Grounds, Verse 5', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta*. Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.

otherwise flimsy projectile weaponry more viable. Leaving the player character open to getting hit also sometimes appears a viable means of baiting enemies. Enemies that are so big that they span off screen have to be dashed around quickly, to move to some unguarded spot near their body, then to a temporary weak spot, and back to a safe place, before the overpowered attacks of these lumbering monsters might instantly quash the player character.[320] In other sections of the game, enemies are so big that they only leave one path open to the player at any one moment.[321] The challenge then is in predicting their intentions, from what limited parts of their body are even visible on screen.

Sometimes, when the player character cannot be made to adapt to a given set of opponents, other modes of engagement are offered. The player character might be made to wield a large stationary canon, for example, to hold off projectiles that would instantly kill them otherwise.[322] In other sections, time may be magically slowed to a stop, or gravity can be bent around, or mounted vehicles are available, so that the player character can still move fast or agile enough, relative to opponent actors and environmental hazards.[323] In turn, enemies and hazards act slow and predictably, only rarely really endangering the player character, so that they seem equally ill suited for this conflict.

The fictional world of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* conveys the sense that all its actors struggle equally, fighting over a shared land. *Bayonetta*, though, seems geared toward depicting a clash of beings fundamentally alien to each other, having to adapt. The overt lack of a shared way of moving, for most of these actors, strengthens this message.

2.7.7. Summary of findings

Most other actors in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* collectively mirror the player character's abilities, excepting the capacity for stealth and covert action. Each actor seems potentially able to share in the same various forms of mobility, the same capacity for violence or command, and even the same ways of earning new strengths and weaknesses. This seems based on some overriding rule system, which procedurally divides properties and abilities between actors, determining who gets to do what in this game, from a shared breadth of options.

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[320] 'Chapter I - The Angel's Metropolis, Verse 4', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta.* Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.

[321] 'Chapter IV - The Cardinal Virtue of Fortitude, Verse 1', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta.* Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.

[322] 'Chapter XV - A Tower to Truth, Verse 8', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta.* Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.

[323] 'Chapter III - The Burning Ground, Verse 6', 'Chapter VI - The Gates of Paradise, Verse 2', 'Chapter XIII - The Cardinal Virtue of Prudence, Verse 1', 'Epilogue - Requiem, Verse 1', in: Kamiya, H., Shibata, H., Yamada, M. (2010), *Bayonetta.* Osaka: PlatinumGames, Inc.

This shared choreographic proposition also seems to govern the capacity for differentiation for all these actors, then. Even if the means to control their character's actions and growth look different for the player, than it does for non-player characters, the means themselves differ little. The player seems equally matched, in a meaningful way, by any of the other actors they might encounter in this game. The player character also expresses a shared ideology of hyperviolent meritocracy, and they share goals and immediate intentions with their stated enemies.

At the same time, each category of actor is differentiated by their lacking some ability or property that other actors might have, or they differ by how their simulated personality influences their performance stylistically. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, actors are meaningfully individuated, based not on their isolated unicity, but on a moving system that they all share in. They share a capacity for distinct types and categories of movements, interpretable as distinct choreographies. The interpretability of those choreographic propositions enables each actor to express themselves differently in each situation. Each individuating modulation of a shared choreography is in large part what renders the game's actors as meaningfully distinct entities in this larger fictional world.

Having previously conceived of this game as a relationscape, wherein the image of collective action seems accumulated by all these discrete acts and actors, as well as this opposite notion of the game as a choreographic proposition, wherein each actor's individuality emerges from the interpretability of a larger movement system, the paragraph that follows looks at how collective and individuated movements can simultaneously be enacted.[324] For this, I explore Manning's notion of mobile architectures.[325] With this notion, individuated relational movement seems to define whatever system it relates to.

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[324] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 170, 183., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 89-90.
[325] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-101.

Figure 08 - The top image shows an opponent in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, angered and baited by the player character having decimated a specific unit of their personal guard. The bottom image shows the player character taking that commander's example, recruiting a personal guard of their own with magically enthralling touches. Actors are an example to each other in this game, enticing each other to compete and subsist certain ways.

2.8.-. Video games as proposing choreographic mobile architectures

2.8.1. Paragraph outline

Manning uses choreography as a conception of how an environment proposes, to its inhabitants, some of the ways they might move through it.[326] Environments, themselves distinct movers and systems of movement, move to mediate from their backgrounded role. Choreographies can be proposed like this, at all scales and speeds, by human professionals and inanimate objects alike.

For Manning's purposes, larger systems of motion necessarily propose their choreographies in a manner that is open to interpretation. This enables other movers to individuate themselves, against that backgrounded system of movement, with each their own foregrounded interpretation of that shared choreographic proposition. This illustrates, to Manning, one way in which discrete actors appear as individuals. It can be how discrete actors are distinguished from one another, and from the larger systems that move them.

Manning's last concept predominantly derived from dance, in *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, is that of the choreographic proposal as a mobile architecture.[327] Mobile architecture, here, alludes to a specific way in which individuated movers can seem to determine and reformulate the systems that moved them to act. This concept of the mobile architecture holds that all individuated expressions of proposed choreographies are, to some degree, active mutations demonstrating that choreography in a different light. These mutations have an extended influence all their own, on other actors sharing the choreography, but also on that initial choreography itself.

Mutated and demonstrative choreographies of this kind, only propositional while individually enacted, can be seen as a fleeting or mobile kind of structure. As such, Manning terms them mobile architectures. For video games, as the following paragraph experimentally shows, a mobile architecture might be how players and personified non-player entities exemplify, to each other, the different ways that a game's proposed systems of action might be put to practice.

2.8.2. Interpretation of the mobile architecture concept

Halfway through *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*, Erin Manning looks at choreographer William Forsythe's choreographic objects, as installation art that exemplifies how any form of entity can be seen to instigate a choreography of some kind, to the individual movers framed as inhabiting and enacting these entities.[328] In a later chapter, Manning describes Forsythe's *Synchronous Objects* website, as one such choreographic object. Manning notes that *Synchronous Objects* puts several examples on

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[326] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 89-90.
[327] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-101.
[328] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 96-98.

display, of personalized interpretations and alternative appropriations, as exemplary mutations that relate to some original choreography.[329]

Synchronous Objects is a web platform that invites its audience to browse through disparate displays and computer renders, all overtly based on video recordings of the same performance of *One Flat Thing, reproduced*. Each juxtaposed interpretation of these recordings outlines and emphasizes different choreographic elements that are apparently present in the original dance. These show different ways that this recording can be reinterpreted, each forming some new variant of the same dance, in turn open to being interpreted by the *Synchronous Objects* audience.[330] One computer render of this dance might superimpose lines and dots onto the video recordings, foregrounding a choreography of dancers conveying cues to one another. Another display of the same dance focuses on the relative positioning of movers, by showing only a top down view of the stage. Another rendering of the dance only shows a graph, with peaks and valleys growing to indicate the amount of movement occuring at each site on the stage.

All these juxtaposed variants of *One Flat Thing, reproduced* show different ways that some original choreographic object might be reinterpreted and appropriated, as different animated visualization, each somehow proposing a choreography of their own, in the transient moment that they enact it. Abstract as they each are on their own, these reinterpretations all obviously relate to some original choreography. Each screen in *Synchronous Objects*, then, seems to pick out just some choreographic elements to emphasize, and not others. This foregrounds how each interpretation takes the original dance in some new direction. Each screen display communicates to its audience, especially juxtaposed as they are, that every individual interpretation of a given dance can invite others to interpret this same dance in their own way.

With just a general reference to the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Manning coins the term mobile architectures, for this kind of appropriated and demonstrative choreographic proposition.[331] Manning uses this term, for what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the overt interpretability of any artwork. This interpretability, to Deleuze and Guattari, makes an art object stand on its own. That various people can be seen to interpret and appropriate some different aspect of the same work, is what makes that one object seem interesting and inviting, despite what others may have already done with it.

To Manning, the term mobile refers to how fleeting and malleable this sense of interpretability is. The term architecture refers to the choreographic aspect of it, that something structural and

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[329] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100.
[330] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 102-104.
[331] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-102.

formative is expressed in each individuating enactment. Each individual mover seems to express an already interpreted choreographic proposition in their own way.[332] This both recalls the interpretability of that original choreographic proposition, and it demonstrates a new, personalized choreography to other movers, with the added message that others might invent personalized choreographies of their own, derived from that same shared source.

2.8.3. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the mobile architecture concept

Mobile architectures, as conceived in the above, can also be seen in the way *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*'s empowers its player, and gives them a way to shore up their influence over the game's fictional society, while other actors are shown doing the same.[333] The game seems a choreographic object, that allows one to carve out a temporary space, for practicing one's own style of play in. This hands the player some semblance of control over how the game might approach or oppose them as well, though. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* is seen to adjust to the player's mobile architectures, with its own actors demonstrating ways to equip and prepare for player incursions. They guard and patrol their lands adaptively, and even go out to hunt or bait the player.

Most overtly, a player is rewarded with more freedom of movement, for at least a while, when they've cleared out an enemy base, or eliminated a couple of nearby commanders. Magically enthralling some occupation soldiers can help with conquering or holding some bits of land this way.[334] The opposing soldiers demonstrate the same intent to set up a sphere of influence, though, by setting up fortifications and grouping together, in a way that reflects, or informs, what a player might do.[335] Each approach the player takes is presented, then, as a proposition to the game's actors and systems, inasmuch as they in turn invite the player to act a certain way.

The player can demonstrate to the game their intent to engage violently or covertly, for example, or an intent to play experimentally, or in an exploratory way, or in an invasive manner.[336] These are demonstrative acts of play that are facilitated in the player character's immediate surroundings. If the player plans to carefully survey before engaging, the game will mark surrounding actors, sites of

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[332] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 122-123.
[333] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', 'Brand the Warchiefs', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen - Forge Tower Markers - Advance Time', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[334] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Brand', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Brand', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[335] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity - Marked Target', 'Fort Morn', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[336] 'Warchief Hunt', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

meaningful interaction, and nearby challenge goals.[337] To allow the player to skip past most of what's there to do, if they choose to play with more focused intent, the player character's full sprint and spectral teleportation abilities cause magical invisibility, preventing enemy pursuit.[338] As the player character is made to run past everything, to some intended goal, there are also never many solid barriers in the way.[339] When the player engages aggressively, all nearby enemies will immediately be drawn in to increase the fighting, while a covert approach is facilitated by predictable movements and clear proclamations of intent by nearby actors.[340]

As the player chooses to interpret the game's facilitative systems, and cues for action, in a certain way, their influence on other actors' behaviors is also made clear. Enemy and ally actors will seem to take over certain of the player's behaviors, or they might act opposite to the player's example. As an example of the former, the player can free slaves by killing or scaring off all of their captors.[341] These slaves then either follow the player's example, or that of their detainers, by either running scared or picking up any weapons nearby to go pick a fight.

The preceding paragraph already outlined how enemy army soldiers can exhibit most all of the same behaviors as the player character, seemingly at their own behest. Any actions that they perform to oppose the player can be seen as a cue for the player to adapt, then, or as a demonstration of viable alternative to whatever the player is doing. This occurs at all scales and in all the forms that the player might consider, when planning what to have their player character do.

For example, when opposing commanders keep their own thralls as bodyguards, as they patrol their fortresses and lands, the player might see this as a cue to enthrall their own soldiers from out of the enemy's ranks, and to use them as bodyguards as well.[342] This demonstration of power, by this other actor, might also be a cue for the player to stay away altogether, or to have thralls of their own infiltrate that commander's ranks, positioning them to attack their leader at some opportune time. The game's agents respond in kind to whatever the player does, or they can be seen to set up their own sphere of

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[337] 'Wraith Vision Interface', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', 'Heads-up Display', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[338] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Elven Swiftness', 'Gollum's Story Arc - The One Truth', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Lethal Shadow Strike', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[339] 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Warchief Hunt', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[340] 'Sword Legends - The Fell Beast', 'Dagger Legends - The Wraith', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[341] 'Outcast Rescue Missions - Resistance', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[342] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', 'Brand the Warchiefs', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Brand', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

influence, and conveying choreographic propositions of their own, which in turn might shape the player's sense the shared stage that they are all on, and their sense of how to act on that stage.

An orc fortification might be filled with caged wolf-like monsters, supplementing a procedurally generated garrison leader, who can send animals after the player, but who might be weak to animal attacks himself.[343] The combination of these elements can be a reminder for the player, that mounting and commanding enthralled wolves is a viable approach to assassination. On the other hand, this particular fortress might better be approached in a way that keeps the player character safely distant from those caged monsters. Enemy commanders and groups of soldiers physically demonstrate, through their actions in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*'s busy landscapes, that there are certain ways the player character might best be trained or equipped, or certain ways to best enact and enforce their presence.

Throughout, there is this sense of the game reading and responding to the player's actions in turn. Commanders and their soldiers may comment on the player character's approach, or past failures, whenever they are assaulted.[344] Commanders might mention their being prepared or proactive in countering the player character. The constant shifts in the enemy's ranks, and the player being coaxed into constant activity, mean that these competing spheres of influence, and these contrasting demonstrations of action, have a clear aspect of mobility to them.

The term mobile architecture seems even more appropriate when accounting for the game's shell interface visualizations, of its fictional power struggles.[345] These interfaces, that abstract the relative influence and power struggles, between the game's competing actors, do so in the form of simple maps, superimposed icons, and tension lines. These all give an image of transient structures, or architectures of power.

This actionable demonstration, of mobile architectures interacting, expresses most directly some of the game's core themes and narrative throughlines. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* often references, and demonstrates in action, a practice of physically learning and experiencing the social norms of this violent and densely populated land.[346] Building a sphere of influence for oneself, however temporary, is repeatedly shown as the only way to assure moments of respite, and moments of planning

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[343] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Identity - Page 2', 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Caragor Cages', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[344] 'Warchief Encounter - Introductory Taunt - "These Ghûls are MINE! However You've POISONED them, I will suck it out!"', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[345] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[346] 'Warchief Hunt', 'The Black Captain', 'Brand the Warchiefs', 'Mordor in Flames', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

for longer term subsistence and for harder times. Player and computer driven actors alike convey their intentions and actions, positing equally matched mobile architectures. This creates a sense of a cyclical and balanced political dynamic, whereby every actor is invited to exert and fortify their reach of power, but only ever as much as the perpetual influx of competing actors allows.[347] Moreover, each actor in the game is encouraged to specialize in one style of play, by the rare supply of score tokens, for spending on training a character, gradually making other actors the more demonstrative of differing styles of play.[348] And lastly, each actor is only able to enact their influence over a handful of thralls, before some turn of circumstance and competition will lose them that influence, or at least force them to defend it.[349] In all, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* clearly delineates, invites and narratively situates mobile architectures in all manner of ways.

2.8.4. Contrasting examples of this concept in other games

In games of the *Super Mario Bros.* series, the game's choreographic proposition to the player character isn't overtly stated, and is there to be discovered.[350] It is a concise and clearly delimited choreography though, with all its consequences tangible on the same screen display. In the first game of this series, there are only the run, duck, jump, and sprint actions to combine for the player character, with one modifier token to pick up, which transforms the sprint action into a capacity to throw corrosive bouncing balls.[351] Given only this small range of actions for a player to explore, this game doesn't have as much of this sense of turning the game's choreography into one's own.

Moreover, other actors in *Super Mario Bros.* do not take the player character's actions as their example of creative play, in any meaningful way. These other actors can themselves only move side to side in one way per actor type. Some actors then also throw their endless supply of projectiles at no target in particular. They have no way of responding to the other dynamic elements in the game.[352]

Actors otherwise only differ in terms of how many hits they can take before they're removed from the immediate playing field, if they can be at all. These other individual actors in *Super Mario Bros.*

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[347] 'Warchief Hunt', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[348] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Missions', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[349] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes - Brand', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles - Thrall Assists', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[350] 'World 1: Stage 1-1', in: Miyamoto, S., Tezuka, T. (1985), *Super Mario Bros.* Kyoto: Nintendo Creative Department., 'World 1: Level 1-1', in: Miyamoto, S., Nakago, T., Tezuka, T. (1991), *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Kyoto: Nintendo R&D4., 'Acorn Plains-1 Acorn Plains Way', in: Asuke, S., Iwamoto, D., Kanno, R., Kimura, H., Takemoto, M., Tezuka, T. (2012), *New Super Mario Bros. U*. Kyoto: Nintendo EAD.

[351] 'World 1', in: Miyamoto, S., Tezuka, T. (1985), *Super Mario Bros.* Kyoto: Nintendo Creative Department.

[352] 'World 1', in: Miyamoto, S., Tezuka, T. (1985), *Super Mario Bros.* Kyoto: Nintendo Creative Department.

don't change their own enactment of some seemingly shared choreography, as a result of what a player character is made to do. There is also no sense that a player has to adapt to how other actors turn the game's movement system into their own.

As such, there seems to be no meaningful depiction of mobile architectures in *Super Mario Bros.*, in the way that there is in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Each time the player runs near to a spot where some opponent or environmental hazard first appeared, having been away, that same element will appear every time, exhibiting the exact same behavior as before, regardless of whether it was already defeated or not.[353] Games in this series are more about practicing some perfect route through these predictable clockwork landscapes of increasing complexity, rather than being about mobile architectures, or demonstrative appropriations of shared choreographies. There is no sphere of influence set up by any of these actors, nor are there examples or threats sent out to other competitors for the game's possibility spaces, like there is in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. In games of the *Super Mario Bros.* type, the player is made to focus on just performing their stated role, racing their player character across a landscape of clockwork regularity, to get at the finish line with the most time left from a given time limit, and with as many score tokens as possible in tow.

2.8.5. Summary of findings

Everything a player does, in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, builds them some more room for specific movements and ways of carving out more space. This freedom to move is always kept small enough, with the game's other agents pushing back on the player's conquests, so as to give the impression that there are all these different individuated actors trying to fully bring about and realize their own expression of the game's overriding choreographic proposal. These parallel expressions of each of their full range of freedoms influence one another, inasmuch as they foster equally matched rivalries. The game becomes less about its discrete actors, than about how each brings their own expression of the game's choreographic proposals to the table.

This conception puts the fictional rules and etiquette of the game's hyperviolent meritocracy front and center. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, a player is allowed to play with all of the game's systems and rules, only inasmuch as the player character's equals are shown to do so. Nevertheless, as these other characters show them, with their unique personalities, and their distinct strategies of persistence, there is still room here for actualizing oneself to the fullest potential, and for exploring one's individuality. As such, the game comes to be about the player character integrating into this strange and

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[353] 'World 1: Stage 1-1', in: Miyamoto, S., Tezuka, T. (1985), *Super Mario Bros.* Kyoto: Nintendo Creative Department.

dangerous society, making it their own and sharing their way of being with the other inhabitants, for all of them to decide to go along with or resist.

The game will constantly push back on the player character expanding their influence, making this an endless and ongoing process, of building mobile architectures, and encountering other mobile architectures in kind.[354] This coaxes a constant humble and attentive way of seeing and engaging with this game's fictional world. The player is made aware that they share a limited space. They have to constantly struggle and express their potency, maintaining an influence in this world, lest they be hunted down and barred from further engaging. Others actors will simultaneously seek expression and power for themselves, though, in this same shared space. The final paragraph of this chapter conceptualizes that experience, of having to be attentive, with more detail, by using a final set of concepts from Erin Manning's books.[355]

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[354] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-101.
[355] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 133-137.
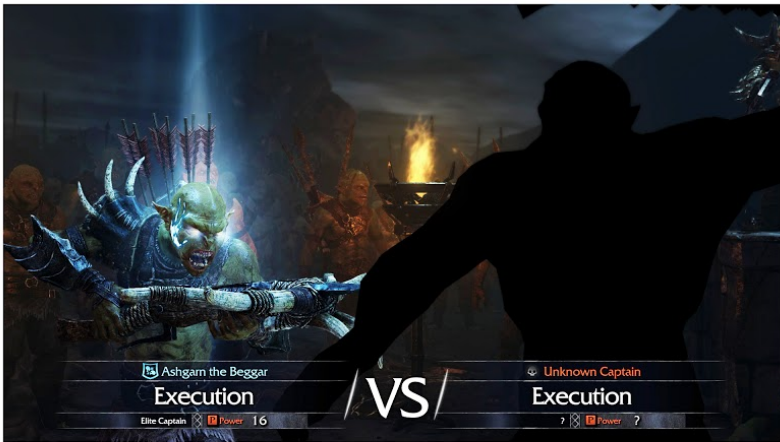
Figure 09 - The top left image here shows a player's personal thrall in Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, fighting their way up the enemy army's hierarchy, as depicted in the game's army overview interface screen. The top right shows an event marker on the map screen, at which the player character can try assisting a thralls, who chose their own precarious way of furthering the player's cause. The bottom image shows the player character partaking in this same event, as enthralled soldiers to their left bully the soldiers at right into joining the player's cause. This game urges a player to attend the needs of specific personified actors, as each struggles to assert themselves.

2.9.-. Contrapuntal diagrammatic praxis as playfully attentive individuation

2.9.1. Paragraph outline

The first case study of this thesis experimented with Manning's conception of tango dance, as a way of moving that shows individuated movements as always involved in meaningful movement systems.[356] Manning defined this as a politics of touch, given her case study. The next six paragraphs of this thesis explored this imbrication of movement across scale levels in more detail. The first three of these outlined some relevant aspects of individuated movement, which always seem involved in such dynamics. The three notions of preacceleration, technogenetic bodily displacement, and overarticulation, were the main focus of these paragraphs.[357] The next three paragraphs looked at relationscapes, choreographic propositions, and mobile architectures.[358] Those concepts imply, respectively, how larger movement systems can appear as accumulations of minor gestures, how minor gestures can appear as personalized expressions of larger movement systems, and finally how individual expressions of shared choreographies can be themselves choreographic.

To define the conscious experience and a perceived practical intent typical of seeing minor gestures as involved with larger movement systems, Erin Manning uses the concept of the counterpoint at first. This brings her process ontological and cultural analysis of dance back around to her initial conception of a politics of touch, to a more detailed conception of this intentional exploration of the expressive potential of minor gestures in larger political machinations. Counterpoints are individuated gestures, posited as directly related to choreographic propositions, simultaneously in a faithful and interpretive manner.[359]

A diagrammatic praxis is how we can consciously conceive of larger movement systems moving us, to consciously set up counterpoint gestures in relation to them.[360] To Manning, there's a creative tension inherent between what a choreographic proposition prescribes, and what expressive interpretation we individually make of it.[361] Manning describes this as the vitality of a given situation, as the animating force of choreographic propositions, and of the mobile architectures that emerge from individuating movers.

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[356] Manning, E. (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.: 17-18.
[357] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 19-20., Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 13-14, 75., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 38.
[358] Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*; Cambridge: The MIT Press.: 10-11, 222-225., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 87-90., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 100-101.
[359] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 102.
[360] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 133-134.
[361] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 184-186.

Dancing with attention, to Manning, is the conscious creation of a mobile architecture, in relation to a choreographic proposition.[362] Ideally, this expresses an enthusiasm, an attentiveness, for that vitality and animating force of a given situation, and for the actor in it, as that would directly engage those others to create mobile architectures of their own. Manning sees this as a more overtly playful and collective form of individuation through dance-like movement.[363]

This final paragraph, accordingly, looks at the examples from dance that Manning posits, and their applicability to video games. Each of these four concepts deal with the conscious performance of minor gestures, in order to get involved in major movements, and in order to get other individuals to creatively involve themselves too. The counterpoint, diagrammatic praxis, dancing to attention, and playful individuation, are explored in the following, and all applied to a case study.

2.9.2. Interpretation of the counterpoint concept

Manning expands on the concept of the counterpoint, or contrapuntal motions, following her theorization of the mobile architecture. Movers, moving to a perceived choreography, appropriate and personalize that choreography, whether planned or unplanned. This personalized expression becomes choreographic, as a mobile architecture of sorts, when it inevitably serves as some distinct moving example to others who want to distinguish themselves, and when it overtly reflects back on some choreographic proposition seen to have initiated it. Contrapuntal movement is foregrounded, Manning observes, in those cases when individual movements visibly form a mobile architecture.[364]

Alignment and cueing are other terms used by Manning, in her aforementioned analysis of William Forsythe's digitally malleable video reproduction *One Flat Thing, reproduced*, on the *Synchronous Objects* software platform, for what movements might exemplify mobile architectures. Manning's use of counterpoint and contrapuntal movement more clearly imply the reciprocality of minor gestures and major movement systems. This is what I want to get at with the concept, given how Manning expands on the political and ethical intent that it might be an expression of.[365]

Manning describes the contrapuntal movement that appears in one of the interface screen of *Synchronous Objects*, when markers of cues and alignments between dancers on a stage are superimposed, over a recording of their dancing *One Flat Thing, reproduced*.[366] This computer rendered and manipulable superimposition indicates some appropriative potential to its discrete user, some new

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[362] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 108, 138-140.
[363] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 211-214.
[364] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 102.
[365] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 153-154, 168, 171-172, 180-183, 190.
[366] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 102-106.

computer rendered choreography, rendered out of that initial performance recording. The alternative datafied computer visualizations accessed through this same interface are indicative of more ways in which the original dance performance can lead to new choreographies. The simultaneity, of all these options for modulating some original choreography, is what makes each computer visualization appear as a minor contrapuntal gesture, in relation to the other options and to the original recording of a performed choreography.

Manning further explains this notion in the final chapter of this book, when she discusses the primatologist Dawn Prince-Hughes' anecdote of her and a gorilla coaxing each other into playing.[367] A contrapuntal movement appears here, with these two actors noting the choreographic proposition of the fence barring direct physical interaction between them, and the range of open field in which this fence stands.[368] Respecting the situation, wherein they can't directly interact, but appropriating its constrained affordances for personal expression, they each goad the other on in turn, getting the other to run after them along the fence. This is a contrapuntal gesture, that shows each of them giving personal expression to the choreographic proposition they both share, in such a way that the gesture is recognizable and responded to as a mobile architecture.[369] The primatologist and the gorilla contrapuntally invite each other, taking turns, to express their own interpretation, of what freedom of movement they share in a constrained situation.

2.9.3. Interpretation of the diagrammatic praxis concept

Diagrammatic praxis is first proposed as a term, by Manning, to reimagine her earlier concept of the mobile architecture, as an overtly intentional individuating movement.[370] This, again, is a part of her detailed analysis of William Forsythe's *One Flat Thing, reproduced*, as rendered on the software platform *Synchronous Objects*.[371] Mobile architectures might otherwise seem like these distinct choreographic figures, propagated by the example of individuated movers, but separate from them.

Diagrammatic praxis is a way of recognizing that those contrapuntal movers are still actively involved when these mobile architectures appear.[372] Only while the contrapuntal gestures in *Synchronous Objects* are overtly displayed, with dots and lines superimposed on the images of these distinct dancers, do we recognize that these dancers inform one another's movements.[373] Each poses

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[367] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 206-211.
[368] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 206.
[369] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 209-211.
[370] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 107.
[371] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 104-108.
[372] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 106-107.
[373] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 104-105.

mobile architectures to others, or ways of personally acting on a shared choreographic situation. The instant an enacted mobile architecture is recognized by the other dancers, each is off to practice and demonstrate a mobile architecture of their own. The original proposition is then immediately lost in the commotion.

A mobile architecture is always related to some individuating practice, and only noticeable while that individuation is happening. Manning reiterates this throughout the chapter, with various other case studies.[374] Mobile architectures are indicative of some intentional diagrammatic praxis, to Manning, or some intentional practice of contrapuntal motion taking place, to inform some new and personalized choreographic proposition.

Manning describes diagrammatic praxis more concretely in a later chapter, by the example of an actual dance exercise.[375] This exercise, in adaptively diagramming the personal enactment of a choreographic stage, starts with one laying on the ground, eyes closed. One imagines the space around, and moving around in that space. After imagining the choreographic proposition of one's surroundings, and imagining moving along and against it, one would stand up, eyes still closed, and reimagine that same space from a different bodily vantage. Finally, the exercise demands you actually move into this imagined surrounding, only to then open your eyes and take in the physical circumstances and results of your motions. Conceiving of contrapuntal gestures is shown to require some mental image here, of the surrounding one is moving into or along with.[376]

Testimonies of the exercise show this mental model, or diagram, to always be shifting, and relative to dynamic situations. This exercise emphasizes how choreographic propositions, and one's capacity for contrapuntally enacting a mobile architecture that is based on them, depends on how one adaptively imagines, and actually senses, one's own pose and motions in a mutable and malleable situation.[377] Manning sees the exercise as training its practitioners to recognize diagrammatic praxis, as a factor in all mobile architectures. Some individuating intentionality, conscious or no, can always be seen to be behind a mobile architecture's illustrative personalization of seemingly shared choreographic propositions.

2.9.4. Interpretation of the dance of attention concept

The later chapters of Erin Manning's *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* focus mainly on affective qualities of minor gestures as they relate to major movement systems. Manning examines how

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[374] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 109, 114, 121.
[375] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 133.
[376] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 134-135.
[377] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 136.

diagrammatic practices might generally be experienced and motivated, despite the various forms they might take. She theorizes what could be said to drive such contrapuntal movement, what intentions are expressed by it, and finds attention the most fundamental driver on several occasions[378].

This is attention in the sense of being attentive to another individual's needs and capacities, or attending to broader codes of accepted conduct and freedoms for expression. In Forsythe's mobile architecture of *One Flat Thing, reproduced*, specifically in its digitally malleable reproductions on the *Synchronous Objects* software platform, what is demanded of anyone engaging is a practiced and knowing attention to the cues it gives, while its digitized and datafied dance performances are playing.[379] In order to take up and personalize the mutable choreographies expressed by this work, an online library of digitized and datafied dance, one at least has to recognize how cues were abstracted to its digital platform, from out of originating dance performances. These initial digitizations, then, express the platform's inviting potential for appropriating and personalizing its choreographic propositions in turn. Being able to take up dance practices of any kind, based on those digital variations of *One Flat Thing, reproduced*, exemplifies a dance of attention, or a live recognition of abstracted choreographic cues, and their potential for further modulation.[380]

Any intentional practice of contrapuntal movement, formalized to any degree in some diagrammatic praxis that accounts for minor gestures and larger movements in imbrication, demands a sustained attention and constant response to how one's individuation motions modulate an original choreographic proposition.[381] One also has to attend to how individuating movements might be seen as a mobile architecture by others, seeking to distinguish themselves by likewise modulating some choreography they inhabit.

Attention, as Manning describes it, is a mode of existence, an experiential quality without which no personal gesture can be seen to relate to its choreographic context, nor to other actors influenced by it.[382] What is attended to is everything involved in one's diagrammatic praxis.[383] The dance of getting something's attention, or attending to what something can recognize and respond to, is compared by Manning to how all works of art put forward a framed experience to a select audience, for that audience to internalize and put into practice somehow.[384]

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[378] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 107.
[379] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 105-108.
[380] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 108-110.
[381] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 138-142.
[382] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 140
[383] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 141-142.
[384] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 140.

In diagrammatic praxis, you at least have to be able to recognize how your actions relate to a mental model, and to the realities that both are based in. This makes diagrammatic praxis, as a formalization of contrapuntal gestures, into a dance of attention, or an act of gaining the recognition of, and coming to recognize, the other movers and major movement systems that relate to your gestures. This necessary attentiveness in diagrammatic praxis, which Manning posits is a sign of its ethical and political viability, can lead to several more specific experiences, among which those of loving engagement and enthusiasm.[385] Playfulness, to Manning, is an experience and intent that encapsulates both of those specific experiences, even as it suggests some specific forms of diagrammatic praxis to go along with it.[386]

2.9.5. Interpretation of the playful and collective individuation concept

Manning references playing and playfulness throughout this book, mostly in the sense of experiencing the wiggle room in a given situation, and experimenting with that meaningfully constrained freedom of specific movements. Play occurs between any two objects or forces, in these many cases where it is referenced. Manning might, in one instance, refer to the interplay of shifting lights and shadows, lending some aspect of safety to a canyon floor.[387] In another chapter, she references film music in this same sense, as it alternates between being diegetic and nondiegetic to what is seen on screen alongside it.[388] The specific use of music referenced playfully alienates its audience, to replicate how memories might seem both distant and yet absorbing during the same act of recollection.

Manning rarely references two human players interacting this way. In the coda to her book, when she examines the interplay between discrete humanoid actors, a certain gorilla and the primatologist Dawn Prince-Hughes, Manning maintains this same sense of the word play, though.[389] In this case, the primatologist expressed such enthusiasm during the described encounter, and attentively played into the gorilla's apparent intentions, to such a degree, that the gorilla subsequently expressed a kinship with this human, seemingly with no regard for their differing biologies.

Playful individuation, to Manning, is one of the ways in which a contrapuntal and diagrammatic practice can be seen to meaningfully invite together several individuating actors, which might otherwise seem most defined by their differences. The practice also meaningfully imbricates the minor gestures of these same actors with those major movement systems that enable them both to distinguish between

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[385] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 153-154, 168, 171-172, 180-183, 190.

[386] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 206.

[387] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 27.

[388] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 56.

[389] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 206.

one another.[390] Playfully engaging with other discrete actors, by inviting another to respond, or to move alongside, as you're expressing your own distinct identity to them, this requires attention to what the other individual seems able to do, compared to what you find yourself capable of with a given diagrammatic practice.

More than just paying attention does, this playful style of diagrammatic practice, repeating experimental interactions to explore its potential, waiting for a response each time, and trying to invite action in a way that the other recognizes, this all demands a certain degree of loving enthusiasm for the other's potential capacity to relate. You also have to be open to the other influencing your behavior, as much as the choreography you share already does. Manning expanded on the notions of enthusiasm and loving attention, and the ethical and political value of those, in some chapters prior, but she most overtly couples the terms to diagrammatic praxis in this coda to her book, by describing playful individuation as necessarily enthusiastic and loving.[391]

2.9.6. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the counterpoint concept

In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, as the preceding paragraphs may already have illustrated, the player is always made aware that they are performing minor gestures within complicated movement systems, shared with other capable actors that can respond in kind. Manning might describe these kinds of player actions as contrapuntal gestures. Contrapuntal movement comes to the fore in how the player character has relative freedom to survey most situations before acting. They are made able to approach any site of action from many directions, mostly at a moment of their choosing.[392] Enemy encampments are always sited out in open fields or broad canyons, with several sides unguarded or otherwise open to infiltration. There are always various clear lines of covert approach, which will also offer a good overview of where guards are patrolling.

Even if not, then the player character will have those magical powers or stealthy movement techniques that keep them from being seen. For example the ghost powered print, and the magical arrows that can be shot off and traveled along with at great speed.[393] Surveillance is supplemented by aforementioned shell interfaces, those that map and track which commander and enemy troop is

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[390] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 211-214.
[391] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 153-154, 171-172, 180-183, 190.
[392] 'Fort Morn', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[393] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Elven Swiftness', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities - Shadow Strike', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

stationed where, and whether there's any infighting or other action already ongoing when a player arrives.[394]

Within these complex situations, the player will be aware that they are only ever able to take out one guard at a time, that patrolling soldiers might send for reinforcements or close off the immediate perimeter to block an escape. Some commander might suddenly come in to hunt for the player character. Moreover, the player character can't be made to act at a distance, and they have to be physically present, always surrounded on all sides, to bodily perform any action the player intends to openly take.

2.9.7. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the diagrammatic praxis concept

The player character's minor gestures, overtly situated as they are in large, complex, and dynamic situations, will always seem like contrapuntal gestures of a kind. They are depicted as small movements intent on drawing other actors and larger moving systems into a response, rather than sweeping acts of far ranging power or immediate result. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, the player character has the ability to covertly move about, to hide up on buildings and down in bushes, behind buildings or low walls.[395] Adding in their ability to break a pursuing enemy's line of sight after being found out, or to quickly eliminate that enemy before others take notice, the player is coaxed into moving about these densely populated environments relatively untroubled, at least when they first approach a situation.[396]

There is a perceived relative freedom from consequence that motivates a player to plot and scheme, as to what specific minor gestures they might perform, for getting at a desired response from the game's systems. This is one of those aspects of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* that most overtly invite a diagrammatic praxis from the player. The shell interfaces tracking enemy troop divisions, depicting divisions of territory, as well as showing the rivalries and changeups in the occupation army's command structure, are also motivating the kind of mental modelling that drives Manning's notion of a diagrammatic praxis.[397] With various systems, this game encourages a player to preemptively imagine or map out a given situation in relative freedom, which the player then consciously chooses to delve into, knowing that they will be performing just some minor gesture, which will ripple out in ways that can only then be adjusted to and played with.

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[394] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[395] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Awareness', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[396] 'Dagger Legends - Deathly Whispers', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[397] 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army', 'Shell Interface - Map Screen', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

2.9.8. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the dance of attention concept

Late in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, the widest reaching and most lasting influence the player can extend for themselves is when they are able to magically enthrall several of the occupation army's soldiers, magically touching them with the ghost that their player character shares a body with.[398] Suddenly, like the commanders they've been assassinating all this time, the player character is able to interrogate others for troop deployments and movements, able to hold a retinue of bodyguards, to physically send these out to pick a fight with nearby soldiers, or to send them off to violently struggle their way up the enemy's command structure, and maybe even to infiltrate one of the higher commanders' inner ranks of trustees.[399] These enthralled soldiers are as disposable and at risk as any of the other occupants of these lands, so this extent of power is only ever temporary, and a constant struggle to maintain.

Even when directly taking over army elements like this, or when clearing out an entire garrison of soldiers, or when freeing all the slaves in a region, the player attains strained, indirect, and temporary influence over these sections of the game's world. These are mobile architectures that a player sets into motion. They are dynamic and temporary arrangements, and they serve as a direct cue for other actors in the game world, to take power for themselves after the player's example. The player character will also still have to be physically present, to command their thralls, to keep a fortress unoccupied, and to see freed slaves to a safe escape.

Nevertheless, there are apparently degrees of success in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, in subsisting and attaining some temporary measure of power, as a part of its fictional society. A player can conquer and make lasting changes for just a bit, as long as they recognize that this influence is temporary and of limited range, and that it requires constant on the ground maintenance. They will have to plan, and expect the most resistance, when going for these larger measures of influence. Most crucially though, a player has to recognize that these actions are only ever attainable through small contrapuntal gestures, and that these require a careful diagrammatic praxis. A player will be accumulating small measures of influence, accounting for all the unpredictable rippling effects of these actions, and making sure to recognize the right opportunities to accumulate more control.

Magically enthralling nearby soldiers or commanders, and keeping them under your thrall, demands most obviously what Manning would call a careful dance of attention. These are not abstract

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[398] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[399] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes - Brand', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles - Thrall Assists', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor.* Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

systems of action a player engages with, but discrete actors equally as potent as the player character. Sneaking up to these soldiers, or wearing them down in battle, to the degree that they can be held down with the magical enthralling touch, demands careful attention to their keen senses of hearing and sight, to what weaponry and armor one has to contend with, and to what personality these characters carry into battle.[400]

After this, effectively deploying these soldiers as bodyguards or as allied commanders demands a player memorize their defining traits. Sending a thrall out to infiltrate the retinue of some high ranking commander, when they are known to panic and run in ambush situations, means it will be unwise to call for their betrayal, without at least some support from the player character, or from other members of that same retinue.[401] Taking a lightly armoured archer along as a close bodyguard, into a highly defended encampment, is similarly unwise.[402] Thralls sent out to infiltrate will automatically work their way up the occupation army ranks, or they will perish, since it is only ever a matter of time before some other commander acts on a grudge against them, or before some upstart soldier seeks to compete for their stature.[403] A player seeking to maintain a sure hold on some element of the enemy's army will have to pay careful attention to any conflict that their thralls might run into, and then rush to their aid when that happens.

2.9.9. Interpreting *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* with the playful collective individuation concept

These latter examples most clearly illustrates *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* calling for a dance of attention. The game calls for the player to constantly heed the needs, intentions and actions of whatever other actors they are embroiled with, and most definitely those handful of soldiers they can hold as their thralls. Like in Manning's example of the primatologist and the gorilla, *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* presents a shared playground, for the player and some of its digitally simulated actors to inhabit, and for them to playfully explore together, with each action defining both themselves and others as a part of this exploration.[404]

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[400] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[401] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Ability Unlocked: Brand', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles - Thrall Assists', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[402] 'Queen Marwen's Story Arc - Queen of the Shore', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[403] 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles - Thrall Assists', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[404] 'Warchief Hunt', 'Brand the Warchiefs', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

The game selectively facilitates their agency in such a way that all these actors collectively come to embody these individual characters, in this fictional hyperviolent meritocracy.[405] Each actor in this game is playfully measured against the other's assertive force, in tests of carefully planned yet unpredictably unfolding physical violence. This happens through contrapuntal gestures that demand careful attention, and patient consideration, to an action's consequences rippling out, and to these other actors and their responses. This is repeated at length, and in whatever number the player seeks out. With Manning, this might be called a clear display of playful individuation, of intentional and enthusiastic engagement in a diagrammatic praxis, in displays of loving and attentive experimentation.

Sure enough, rather than attaining some definite victory over their oppressors, or some appeasement of their bitterness over being conquered, or some peaceful life elsewhere, the player character, and the ghost they share a body with, end the prescribed narrative sequence of this game fully committed, to continue their on foot and personal engagement with each of these individual soldiers that trample their lands.[406] The player character might at first have seemed to resist, but they only end up seeming fully integrated in the perpetual cycle of violence that these invaders have structured their society around.[407] By the story's fixed end point, the player character has helped other victims escape, and they have taken out those army leaders that the narrative presented as the most brutal, but they have not met any permanent allies, nor made a lasting impact on the occupation of their homeland.[408]

The most a player might have attained for their player character is a temporary, vulnerable retinue of enthralled soldiers, each of which will still be preoccupied with the struggle for their own subsistence.[409] Otherwise, the player might have attained more techniques and tools for their player character, to help them better get along with this game's politics of touch, with the cycle of physically performed violence that this game depicts.[410] What gives even more of this sense that the player character playfully and enthusiastically chooses to integrate into a full society of like minded brutes, each

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[405] 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Ratbag's Story Arc - The Spirit of Mordor', 'Mordor in Flames', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[406] 'Mordor in Flames', 'Mordor in Flames - Post-Credits Video', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[407] 'Talion's Story Arc - Prologue', 'Talion's Story Arc - Entering Mordor', 'Mordor in Flames', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[408] 'The Black Captain', 'Hirgon's Story Arc - The Outcasts', 'Lithariel's Story Arc - The Rescue', 'Lord of Mordor', 'Mordor in Flames', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[409] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes - Brand', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles - Thrall Assists', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.
[410] 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Attributes', 'Shell Interface - Upgrades - Abilities', 'Shell Interface - Weapons & Runes', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

reinforcing the others' roles, is that the game demands a player attend to whatever traits and intentions these others exhibit, and that a player account for these other actors being their equal, as a prerequisite before they even stand a chance vying for subsistence.[411]

2.9.10. Contrasting examples of these concepts in other games

Several video games in the popular *Assassin's Creed* franchise would again provide counterexamples to the above.[412] In *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, specifically, a player character is sent into a violently occupied and oppressed land, as they are in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*.[413] They are also tasked with clearing out enemy outposts, with avoiding guard patrols and search parties, and with eliminating the enemy's leadership, while recruiting others to join in their efforts.[414]

That game does not adaptively simulate how surrounding society responds, though, or how local institutions of power might resist the player's efforts at permanent change. In *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, there are no systems to depict the player's incursions as a diagrammatic praxis demanding constant attentive gestures, or as playful individuations relative to these larger moving systems, and relative to other autonomous individuals. When the player character is discovered and pursued by aggressive guards, there are no clear indicators of their patrol routes, their lines of sight, or of where they will begin looking for you.[415] This makes playing into other characters' behaviors harder to do than in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*.

Those other agents that you can recruit to your cause will only ever act when the player sends them to kill or distract an enemy directly.[416] Moreover, these allies do not have to be convinced to join. They are already intent on resisting the occupying army. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, such allies would be put to this task indirectly, by sending them out to act on their own within the enemy's ranks. From there, they each would decide a unique approach, based on their personality traits, with the player left to attend and aid them from the sidelines, adapting to constant change. In *Assassin's Creed:*

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[411] 'Shell Interface - Appendices - Tutorial: Missions', 'Nemesis System Missions - Power Struggles', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Player Character Killed', 'Shell Interface - Sauron's Army - Warchief Killed', in: De Plater, M., Forgey, M.D., Hoge, C., Roberts, B. (2014), *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, Inc.

[412] Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft., Désilets, P., May, C., Puel, S. (2009), *Assassin's Creed II*. Montreal: Ubisoft., Guesdon, J., Ismail, A., May, C., McDevitt, D. (2013), *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal.

[413] 'New Man in Town', in: Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft.

[414] 'New Man in Town', 'Man of the People', in: Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft.

[415] 'Well Executed', in: Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft.

[416] 'Serial Offender', in: Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft.

Brotherhood, guard posts and patrols are staffed with a set unit of soldiers, and cleared permanently when conquered.[417]

Opposing leadership isn't replaced, and allied guards will take over permanently and immediately, whenever a new conquest is made. With everything the player does, they leave a fixed mark on the landscape, as the player character is depicted as having definitively furthered their own idealized political intent. Consequently, this game becomes less about attending to the fictional world's dynamics and customs, nor about the player character providing an example for allied actors to follow in their own way. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* is exemplary of many games similar to *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, which depict worlds with no room for playful individuation shared between actors, and with little capacity for diagramming and experimenting with a choreography of one's own.

2.9.10. Summary of findings

Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor constantly calls the player to attention, and has them playfully distinguish themselves in a way that invites the game to respond. The player is invited to repeatedly mentally model the larger situations they are in, and the individual actors they can use to get a grip on the game's larger systems. In all this, the game emphasizes how the player's every action is always just a counterpoint to larger movements, only of local temporary influence. Moreover, the player's every gesture is best adapted to not trouble other local actors too much, lest they retaliate with overwhelming force. A lot of times, the player's actions are even of convenience to those other actors. This type of behavior that the player is coaxed into, or limited to, is exemplary of what Manning conceives of as a playful dance of attentive individuation.[418] The player character can only be made to differentiate themselves, by conceiving of the larger whole that they are a part of, ad the individual actors that surround them.

The following chapter, in closing, presents a brief concluding summary of this present chapter. It summarizes how I have so far interpreted Erin Manning's dance theory efforts, and experimented with their applicability to video game case studies. I also briefly mention how that transposition of Manning's dance theory might in future be expanded on, with examples of three other theorists whose work might suit this intent. In closing the next chapter, I reflect on the writing of this thesis, and provide a concluding statement.

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[417] 'New Man in Town', in: Désilets, P., Plourde, P., Yohalem, J. (2010), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal, Singapore, Bucharest, Quebec, Annecy: Ubisoft.
[418] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 211-214.

3.-.-. General findings, closing reflections, and further research
3.1.-. A summary of findings
3.1.1. Chapter outline

The preceding chapter showed how Erin Manning's interpretive concepts for meaningful movement systems, derived from analyses of dance, might be transposed to interpret video games, in terms uncommon to game studies. The concepts taken from her books drew out some aspects and elements of the game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. These at least were useful for distinguishing that game from other games, as regards their expressive compositions of motion. Moreover, Manning's concepts influenced an interpretation of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*'s themes and narrative systems, and how they contextualized interrelated moving elements. The following briefly summarizes some of those findings. Following this, a further research section outlines possible expansions to this thesis' theoretical premise, and alternative theorists whose interpretive terms can also be transposed to interpreting games. I close this thesis on a general conclusion, and a final reflection on the writing process.

3.1.2. Summary of the preceding chapter

A politics of touch, from the preceding paragraphs, seems a useful concept for examining how a video game depicts the bodily influence of a player character on its surrounds. Manning sees this concept applying to tango dance, as a politically charged partner dance examining tact and proximity. For *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, this concept points to how all player actions are focalized through the simulated physical body of a discrete player character, tangibly acting on their environment. Whatever change are made in this fictional world, they are made physically.

Preacceleration is a concept for how a discrete mover is enticed by discrete objects, to act within a larger landscape. To Manning, the inviting motions and openings gestured towards, by a leader in partner dance, consciously or unconsciously preaccelerate whatever movements the follower makes. Metastable movement, another concept relevant here, is in an experience of movement persisting when one holds to a stable posture oneself. Examples of preaccelerating game elements in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* are, for example, soldiers leaving their backs exposed when lured to look away form the player, or the handholds that invite climbing to a high up hiding spot. Metastable movement appears as the constant to and fro of hostile hunting parties, for example, or the simulated weather shifting to provide intermittent explosure or advantages for the player. The densely packed constant prompts of preaccelerating elements, even when a player is idle, invite action.

Discrete bodily displacement, relational movement, and the elasticity apparent when action options appear or disappear, in the wake of act just performed, are all concepts to describe how motion

can appear drawn from a well of techniques and technical capacities, discretely embodied in what Manning calls a technogenetic body. The technogenetic aspect of a dancing body appears, for Manning, in some select works of digitally augmented dance. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, a technogenetic body is conveyed by the curt and habitual gestures of its player character, and by the specialized tools they carry and apply. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* shows the well equipped body of a distinct player character. The game's depiction of a technogenetic body serves to encourage a player to still engage, despite them being overwhelmed by preaccelerations constantly.

Overarticulation, to Manning, is the extension of a gesture, its complication, and exaggerating of its impact. It creates a pause to contemplate the consequences and origins of that gesture. To choreographers like William Forsythe and José Gil, overarticulation alludes to the technical capacity behind a move, to how other acts might have occurred, or might be learned in future. In *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, the player character's gestures are often extended, with a slowed or suspended impact, long enough for the player to consider with what action to follow this up, what emergent preaccelerations to respond to, or what modulations to perform for a changed impact to the present action. These overarticulated movements keep a player involved, despite them often repeating similar actions in pursuing similar goals, given that there is always something new to learn, or to try and respond to.

Relationscapes are defined by Manning, over a range of disparate case studies, as landscapes of relations. Framed juxtapositions of actors, in different states of performing action, make them seem animated and animating. Relationscapes are marked by the so-called landing sites of whatever actions were performed on or around them. They exude a tension through its audience having to internalize what elements are at play in these landscapes, to be able to externalize and enact a reading of them. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* continuously juxtaposes multiple actors, acting on a single screen, inciting a variety of responses, and rendering a range of action impacts. This can be seen as a relationscape of sorts, with discrete action impacts marking a landscape image of preaccelerating and overarticulating elements, literally internalized as score tokens, used to attain new abilities for the player character, to exert new influence with.

A game's larger movement systems can also be seen reflected, in each mover's responses to some choreographic proposition, that they take away from the game. Manning theorizes dance as a form of movement that shows how individual movers derive identity from their capacity to uniquely interpret choreographies they see proposed around them. Manning calls this the expression of a choreographic proposition. *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* can be seen to show all its actors a shared range of action potentials. Each actor can then, over the course of encountering others, earning score tokens from the

experience, specialize and assert influence of their own, while sharing in the game's hyperviolent meritocracy. Actors in this game carry similar equipment and share a range of bodily capabilities, but each has a specialization of their own. Actors in this game seem distinguished by how each interpretively enacts some shared choreography of its fictional world.

A mobile architecture appears, theorizes Manning in several case studies, when a mover makes a choreography their own, and expresses this in a way that reflects back on the choreography, while inspiring others to express that choreography their own way. For the analysis of games like *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, this concept can outline how a player is invited to develop their own style of play, by other actors seeming to do the same thing in this shared world. In turn, these other actors respond to the player's example as well. The game's abstracted depiction of interpersonal relations, and of relative distributions of personally asserted power between all these inhabitants of its world, emphasizes how each actor in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* moves and acts with their own style, calling for certain ways to have the player character oppose, evade, or manipulate them.

As a final set of concepts transposed from Manning's work, contrapuntal movement, diagrammatic praxis, and attentive dance each illustrate an aspect of what Manning calls playful individuation. Manning theorizes, from a variety of examples, contrapuntal movements as inviting gestures that overtly relate to shared movement systems and the actors sharing them. These can be intentionally performed, with a diagrammatic practice. They are more effective when performed with attention to another's needs and capacities. Performing them in this way expresses playfulness, and creates a shared space for all actors to playfully assert their individuality. A player in *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor* can only ever temporarily and provisionally diagram the game's larger systems of movement. So many moving elements shift the interactive landscape constantly, that a player's attention is drawn to just playfully getting to know allies and enemies in this fictional world, while knowing that this helps other actors learn how to manipulate and oppose the player in turn. The game doesn't just depict a fictional world to conquer or master, but one in which each actor is constantly out to assert their individuality, in direct physical engagements with all these other actors.

3.1.3. Concluding statement

The extensive case study of *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, and the counterexample case studies included, indicate some viable results from transposing Erin Manning's interpretive concepts for meaningful motion systems, to a game studies analysis. Manning's terms draw out aspects and elements of video games that are not often examined yet, that seem of enough interpretive value in at least the preceding chapter. In closing, the following paragraph on further research outlines a possible expanded

transmedia theory behind projects like these, and some contrasting conceptual frames for motion systems, that can similarly be tested on game studies analyses. I also briefly reflect on the process of writing this thesis, and draw one final conclusion from the work.

Figure 10 - The superimposed choreographic staging interface in Super Mario Maker, which allows its player to meaningfully manipulate the game's movement system and action sequences. Movement in this game, while functionally similar, has meaning in a fundamentally different way compared to preceding case studies.

Figure 11 - The player character in Noby Noby Boy is controlled in a way that incites improvisational play, purely for the purpose of getting to know how its body extends, wraps around stuff, floats lightly in the air, etc. Movement in this game also calls for a different analytic framework from the one used in preceding case studies.

Figure 12 - The player character of The Last Guardian down in front, urging an indirectly controlled semi-autonomous player character on, to help with getting past some obstacle ahead. Another game that calls for further research into conceptual frameworks for meaningful movement systems in video games.

3.2.-. Further Research

3.2.1. An expanded theory for transposing analytic terms between media studies fields

To indicate some of the viable lines of inquiry, that came up in the writing of this thesis, which given the scope of the project were not followed up on, I can first expand on the theoretical frame that I have used for this and other transmedia analysis projects. For the purposes, and given the limited scope, of this present thesis project, it served to just assume the remediation of dance in games, as an index to the presence of meaningful motion systems in games, and as an index to how games might be interpreted with concepts conceived in analyses of dance. Transposing interpretive terms between media, on the theoretical premise of transmediality, also proved enough for this present thesis.

Over the course of earlier work, with an eye to future projects, I have however defined the philosophical and media ontological underpinnings of this experimental type of study more precisely, by collating the following theorists. I would in future start a project like this with a media ontological model of games and dance, for example, akin to the fourfold ontological model currently being popularized by the likes of philosopher Graham Harman, cultural scholar Timothy Morton, and games scholar Ian Bogost.[419] Integrating these kinds of models in media and intermediality landscape images, after Lars Ellestrom or Jens Schröter, would fit juxtaposed analyses of such disparate media more easily and formally into a metasemiotic methodology.[420] The concept of a metasmiotic analysis was posited by linguist Louis Hjelmslev, and extensively established as a viable practice by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in works like *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.[421] This concept, implied in much of their work, formalized their effort to creatively and productively bridge specialized terminologies for disparate fields of study of all kinds.

3.2.2. An expanded set of descriptive concepts for meaningful movement systems to transpose

Besides a more extensive and formal theoretical frame to my methodology, writing this thesis also pointed me to alternative theorists of meaningful movement systems, whose interpretive terms could productively be transposed to video game interpretations. Hetty Blades, Cynthia Novack, and Susan

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[419] Harman, G. (2011) *The Quadruple Object*; Winchester: Zero Books: 73-78, 95-100, 103-104., Morton, T. (2013) *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*; Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press: 19-21, 30-31., Bogost, I. (2012) *Alien Phenomenology: or What It's Like To Be a Thing*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 35-39, 55-56, 61-73, 87-93.

[420] Ellestrom, L. (2010) 'The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations', in: *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*; Ellestrom, L. (ed.); New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 11-48., Ellestrom, L. (2014) *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media*; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan., Schröter, J. (2011) 'Discourses and Models of Intermediality', in: *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*; Vol.13, No.3, Article 3; s.n. (eds.); West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

[421] Deleuze, G., Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Massumi, B. (tr.); Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 22, 77-78, 82-85, 139-148., Hjelmslev, L. (1961) *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*; Whitfield, F.J. (tr.); Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 3-20, 114-127.

Leigh Foster, for example, compare to Manning's efforts in interesting ways.[422] Each of these theorists develops concepts all their own, through analyses of dance. Manning, for example, makes mention of the same kinds of audience perceptions and kinesthetic empathy that Foster expands on. Manning mentions the personal improvisational dance experiences that Cynthia Novack investigates, and she also describes fully choreographed movement systems akin to the ones Hetty Blades calls attention to. However, all four of these dance theory efforts are at an interesting tension.

Blades' notion of a choreographic ontology, or of how everything can be seen as an organized or choreographed system of motion, stands in contrast to Manning's premise of dance as expressive of absolute movement.[423] Manning keeps reiterating that no movement can ever be fully delineated by any choreography. Blades states that all movement holds some notationality, or an indication of a choreographic structure to be drawn from it.[424] The concepts that Blades develops to theorize this in more detail, over several papers, would apply well for describing games like *Super Mario Maker*, as an example.[425] *Super Mario Maker* frames its dynamic and unpredictable action systems as always governed by a precise clockwork logic, which a player can tinker with at any moment during play.

Cynthia Novack provides an anthropology of some dance communities, organized around improvisational attunement to highly personal sensory experiences, and to bodily capacities.[426] The concepts she develops to describe this practice of movement provides a contrast with Manning's statement that improvisational movement never leads to fully discrete and conceptualizable bodily knowledge.[427] The terms Novack uses apply well to a game like *Noby Noby Boy*, however.[428] That game fosters improvisation, with no clearly stated goals. It is also overtly focused on getting a player to test out an unfamiliar body bestowed to them, based only on the sensory experience of controlling that body.

Susan Leigh Foster's notion that dance primarily serves to foster a kind of kinesthetic empathy, finally, starkly contrasts with Manning's preference for the immediate experience of movers, in finding the meaning of motion systems.[429] Games like *The Last Guardian* could well illustrate this way in which movement coaxes out an empathetic reading from an audience, as they interpret the other's

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[422] Blades, H. (2013) 'Scoring Dance', in: *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*; Vol.10, No.2; Baker, A., Steenhagen, M. (eds.); s.l.: British Society of Aesthetics: 43-57., Novack, C.J. (1990) *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press., Foster, S.L. (2011) *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*; London: Routledge.

[423] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 87-90.

[424] Blades, H. (2013) 'Scoring Dance', in: *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*; Vol.10, No.2; Baker, A., Steenhagen, M. (eds.); s.l.: British Society of Aesthetics: 43-57.

[425] Hino, S., Hosaka, A., Kimura, H., Oshino, Y., Tezuka, T. (2015), *Super Mario Maker*. Kyoto: Nintendo EAD.

[426] Novack, C.J. (1990) *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press: 51-59.

[427] Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 35-37.

[428] Takahashi, K. (2009), *Noby Noby Boy*. Tokyo: Namco Bandai.

[429] Foster, S.L. (2011) *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*; London: Routledge: 174-185., Manning, E. (2013) *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*; London: Duke University Press.: 77.

movements through what they recognize of their own capacity to act.[430] A player of the aforementioned video game relies on this constant empathetic interpretation of a game controlled character, who gestures in cryptic ways, that the player has to indirectly get their player character to respond to, so that both characters might work together to navigate the game's spaces.

3.3.-. Reflections on writing and a final conclusion

The preceding should illustrate some various lines of inquiry that this thesis opens up, for future projects. In the process of writing this thesis, the present analysis of Erin Manning's many concepts, and how they might apply to video game studies, proved fertile enough as to become the main focus of this project. The introductory chapter, and the preceding further research section, is also an indicator of the extensive survey I performed of the field of dance analysis, of media theory on transposing interpretive terms, and of extant work, in game studies or elsewhere, on interpreting meaningful movement systems. This perhaps overly extensive preliminary work, compounded with nascent study projects and personal health problems, ensured that the present project took longer to complete than initially planned for. Narrowing the scope of the work, however, and focusing in on the details of that, has hopefully yielded enough of a useful resource for future studies on this topic.

In all, I set out to test the viability of transposing a comprehensive set of Erin Manning's interpretive concepts for meaningful movement systems, developed in her analyses of dance. My extensive interpretation of Manning's work, and the case study interpretation of the game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, shows at least to me that many game elements, interacting continuously and over various ranges of influence, can with this methodology be named and examined in meaningful detail. Such an analysis is difficult if not impossible using extant game studies vocabulary, and it may well prove productive when applied to other video games in future.

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[430] Lee, S., Sato, K., Tanaka, M., Ueda, F., Yamabe, S. (2016), *The Last Guardian*. Tokyo: SIE Japan Studio.

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