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The Expanding Storyworld: An Intermedial Study of the *Mass Effect* novels

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Abstract

This study investigates the previously neglected literary phenomenon of game novels, a genre that is part of the increasing significance that games are having in culture. Intermedial studies is one of the principal fields that examines these types of phenomena, which provides perspectives for understanding the interactions between media. Furthermore, it forms the foundation for this study that analyses the relation between the four novels by Drew Karpysyn (*Mass Effect: Revelation*, 2007; *Mass Effect: Ascension*, 2008; *Mass Effect: Retribution*, 2010) and William C. Dietz (*Mass Effect: Deception*, 2012), and the *Mass Effect Trilogy*. Differences and similarities between the media are delineated using semiotic theories, primarily the concepts of modalities of media and transfers of media characteristics. The thesis further investigates the narrative discourse, and narrative perspectives in the novels and how these instances relate to the transferred characteristics of *Mass Effect*. Ultimately, the commonly transferred characteristic in the novels is the storyworld, which reveals both differences and similarities between the media. Regardless of any differences, the similarities demonstrate a relationship where the novels expand the storyworld.

Keywords: Drew Karpysyn, William C. Dietz, *Mass Effect*, BioWare, storyworld, video games, digital games, intermediality, transmediality, narratology, semiotics

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1. Introduction

The medium of digital games has grown substantially over the past two decades. Academic studies are taking a larger interest in the world of gaming, especially in fields of computer and information sciences, social sciences, and media studies. Cultural studies have also taken an increasing interest in digital games and their impacts on recipients and society. In addition, there are countless studies that use narratology to analyse various narrative structures in games. Despite the commercial growth of the medium and the general academic interest in digital gaming, however, literary studies have yet to take a significant interest in the literary genres that have followed the success of games. The overarching genre is often called tie-ins and has become a common addition to almost every large game franchise. In some studies, the genre is called “novelizations”, although I have yet to find an academic study that tries to categorize the diversities among the different game novels and comics. The term novelization implies, however, a study of the relations between film and literature. Additionally, its strong connections with adaptation studies – and that field’s interest in investigating the adaptations of stories – results in its inadequacy for the study in this thesis. Some of these studies are, nevertheless, interesting from an intermedial standpoint and are thus referred to in the following.

Intermedial studies developed partly from the interdisciplinary field of inter arts studies. In the nineties, its focus started shifting from the relationship between art forms to the relationship between different media. One important advance was made by W. J. T. Mitchell with the words: “*all media are mixed media*”.¹ These were (and in some discourses, still are) controversial words when published over a decade ago in his renowned article “There Are No Visual Media”; he continues: “That is, the very notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual, and semiotic elements.”² More recently, the Swedish literary scholar Lars Elleström contributed to building a new method for comprehending the term “medium”, and additionally provided new perspectives on the interdisciplinary field: “Media, however, are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial

¹ Mitchell, W. J. T., “There are No Visual Media”, *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2005), s. 260, [original emphasis].

² Ibid.

differences that is founded on medial similarities.”³ This understanding of intermediality inspires the aim of this thesis, in which I examine different aspects of the relationship between the *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the four novels by Drew Karpysyn (*Mass Effect: Revelation*, 2007; *Mass Effect: Ascension*, 2008; *Mass Effect: Retribution*, 2010) and William C. Dietz (*Mass Effect: Deception*, 2012).⁴ A central point for the analysis lies in the theoretical distinctions of the relation between the media. The close readings of the four novels are used to illuminate how features of *Mass Effect* is moved between the media and how differences and similarities are manifested.

Additionally, I hope that this dissertation provides some ground for further research in science fiction, other genres of popular culture, and the large amount of world building happening in transmedial franchises in the current literary scene.

1.1. Survey of the field

1.1.1. Novelizations

Previous research on this topic is scarce, which is why this thesis, to some extent, refers to other student theses and dissertations. More specifically, there is an absence of academic research in the sort of novels that are investigated in this thesis. The brief demonstration below illustrates the current scene of interest in researching digital games, and to some extent their tie-ins. The genre of tie-ins is often defined as commercial products, the adaptation scholar Kamilla Elliott’s short mention of novelizations (although she is referring to film novelizations) is that they are often clustered together with merchandise “like CDs and McDonald’s Happy Meals”.⁵

Frans Mäyrä’s *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture* (2008) is a textbook for game studies students and introduces new readers to the field. He is one of the few academics that provides a specific mention of game novelizations: “The storylines driving the gameplay in some successful games have even inspired the publication of full ‘novelizations’ of some

³ Elleström, Lars, “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations”, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 12.

⁴ Karpysyn, Drew, *Mass Effect: Revelation* (New York: Del Rey, 2007). Karpysyn, Drew, *Mass Effect: Ascension* (New York: Del Rey, 2008). Karpysyn, Drew, *Mass Effect: Retribution* (New York: Del Rey, 2010). Dietz, William C., *Mass Effect: Deception* (New York: Del Rey, 2012). The novels are henceforth referred to by solely the latter part of the titles: *Revelation*, *Ascension*, *Retribution* and *Deception*.

⁵ Elliott, Kamilla, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 127.

games.” He indicates the context of these novels, that they are often prequels or sequels and that they “build upon the existing game world, characters and storylines”.⁶

In the newly published *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization* (2017), Kate Newell proposes a network-based model of adaptation in her study of, “print-based modes that have not conventionally been read as adaptations – novelizations, illustrations, literary maps, pop-up books, and ekphrases.”⁷ Through the book, she investigates how these unconventional adaptations add to the larger work of a story, such as novelizations. In the second chapter she determines her viewpoint: “[c]onsidering novelizations as nodes within an adaptation network changes their value and what we value in them.”⁸ Her focus is, however, on literary adaptations of films, how a story in a film is transformed to literature.

The viewpoint of novelizations as an adaptation of film into literature, is the most common in the previous academic research. Another slightly different approach to the adaptive perspective, that additionally acknowledges a similar phenomenon in relation to games, is Jan Baetens’ “Novelization, a Contaminated Genre?”. In the article he suggests that novelizations are inevitably tied to the visual culture of the film. Novelizations desire to be the film’s “double”, “strongly indicates the indirect but considerable importance of the visual, which implicitly constrains the specific properties of the verbal.” Baetens further proposes that this entails that a novelization is an “anti-adaptation”.⁹

In the essay, “Quest for legitimacy: En essä om litterära anpassningar av videospel”, I analyse the subject of game novels from a market perspective.¹⁰ The essay proposes to understand the trend of publishing books in relation to games as part of the institutionalization of both book publishing and game publishing. *Dragon Age*, another franchise from BioWare (the developer of *Mass Effect*), is one example, among others, used to demonstrate the franchise method of publishing since the early 2000’s.

⁶ Mäyrä, Frans, *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008), p. 84.

⁷ Newell, Kate, *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 15.

⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁹ Baetens, Jan, “Novelization, a Contaminated Genre?”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2005), p. 50.

¹⁰ Sundin, Jessika, “Quest for legitimacy: En essä om litterära anpassningar av videospel” (Stockholm University, 2015).

1.1.2. *Mass Effect* and games studies

Though there is no abundance of research done on the *Mass Effect* franchise, the trilogy seems to be of specific interest among students. One student bachelor's thesis on *Mass Effect* is Oskar Kristiansson's "När stjärnor flyttar på sig: En intermedial studie av läsprocessen som den relaterar till *Codex*, det digitala uppslagsverket i tv- och dataspelet *Mass Effect*" (2012). It examines the reading process of "the Codex" in *Mass Effect* (2007), an "in-game encyclopaedia" which can be used by the recipient to gain more knowledge on various characters, planets, technologies, and much more, in the games. Kristiansson concludes that reading processes should consider the intermedial contexts when studying narrative texts in games.¹¹

Jimmie Larsson discusses the narrative structures of *Mass Effect* in the context of ludology, in "Narrativ struktur och inverkans hinder: En fallstudie av de narrativa dimensionerna i *Mass Effect*" (2012). In this bachelor's thesis, Larsson argues for analysing the narrative characteristics in games without looking past the ergodic structures that constitutes them.¹²

A third bachelor's thesis is "En fallstudie i transmedialt berättande genom *Mass Effect*" (2015) by Karolina Rosenqvist. In her thesis, she draws the two timelines; one of the products in the franchise and one of the chronological events of the larger story. They are especially communicative for explaining the larger context that the four novels are situated and published in, which is of use regarding *Mass Effect* as a franchise. Her main concern is the dispersion and chronology of the franchise, and how this timeline of published works can be understood by the gamer.¹³

An anthology that discusses (among other subject matters) the narrativity in digital games is *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media: Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds* (2016), edited by Mari Hatavara, Matti Hyvärinen, Maria Mäkelä and Frans Mäyrä. It aims to open the conversation between different fields of study to form a "transdisciplinary narrative theory". In this contemporary narrative theory, one chapter analyses the trilogy of *Mass Effect* in a case

¹¹ Kristiansson, Oskar, "När stjärnor flyttar på sig: En intermedial studie av läsprocessen som den relaterar till *Codex*, det digitala uppslagsverket i tv- och dataspelet *Mass Effect*" [My trans. "When stars move: An intermedial study of the reading process as it relates to *Codex*, the digital encyclopedia in the video and computer game *Mass Effect*"], BPhil Thesis, (Stockholm University, 2012).

¹² Larsson, Jimmie, "Narrativ struktur och inverkans hinder: En fallstudie av de narrativa dimensionerna i *Mass Effect*" [Author's trans. "Narrative structure and the obstacles of agency: A case study on narrative dimensions in *Mass Effect*"], BPhil Thesis, (Lund University, 2012).

¹³ Rosenqvist, Karolina, "En fallstudie i transmedialt berättande genom *Mass Effect*" [Author's trans. "A case study in transmedia storytelling through *Mass Effect*"], BPhil Thesis, (Lund University, 2015), see e.g. p. 6.

study: “How You Emerge from This Game Is up to You: Agency, Positioning, and Narrativity in *The Mass Effect Trilogy*.” The chapter’s main interest is to explain the unique characteristic of role-playing games, the player’s “acting in a fictional game world via playable character”.¹⁴

Ludology, or games studies, is a large enough field of study for it to be difficult to summarize shortly here, not only are there several anthologies and text books for students, but there are also journals such as *HUMAN IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science*, which actively publish articles in the field.¹⁵ For a journal which directly addresses games from a cultural perspective, see *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*.¹⁶ One book that changed the discourse is Espen J. Aarseth’s *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997). In it, he proposes a different definition of texts in the wake of new media forms which developed during the eighties and nineties. He suggests the term “cybertext” which he uses, “to describe and explore the communicational strategies of dynamic texts.”¹⁷ Although many of his terms and definitions are very interesting, they are not relevant to the aims of this thesis.

1.2. Research aims and questions

I aim to analyse how the relationship between the *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the four novels by Drew Karpishyn (*Revelation*, 2007; *Ascension*, 2008; *Retribution*, 2010) and William C. Dietz (*Deception*, 2012), is distinguishable in various ways. Semiotics and (transmedial) narrative theory form the groundwork for this intermedial investigation which is divided into two parts, containing the following questions:

- What are the medial and modal differences and similarities between the novels and the games? What gets transferred, and how? How do the sign functions of the different media affect the presentation of the storyworld?

¹⁴ Roine, Hanna-Riikka, “How You Emerge from This Game Is up to You: Agency, Positioning, and Narrativity in *The Mass Effect Trilogy*”, *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media: Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds*, ed. Hatavara, Mari; Hyvärinen, Matti; Mäkelä, Maria; Mäyrä, Frans, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 68.

¹⁵ See *HUMAN IT*, <https://humanit.hb.se/index> [Retrieved 2018-05-07].

¹⁶ To my knowledge, *Eludamos*, is no longer actively publishing new issues. See *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture* <http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos> [Retrieved 2018-05-07].

¹⁷ Aarseth, Espen J., *Cybertext* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 5.

- What sort of narrative discourse can be found in the novels? How does the narrative perspective relate to the transferred features of the franchise? How is the experience of addition implemented in the *Mass Effect* novels, in narrative terms?

1.3. Methodology and theoretical framework

In order to understand the relation between the media at hand, they are first defined, along with their differences and similarities. The model Lars Elleström proposes in “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations” (2010) is used for this delineation.¹⁸ It includes, but is not limited to, the three aspects of media: “basic media”, “qualified media” and “technical media”, and the modalities of media: “the material modality”, “the sensorial modality”, “the spatiotemporal modality” and “the semiotic modality”.¹⁹ The modalities are explained in the analysis as the terms are used. Another work by Elleström which is frequently applied to investigate the movement between media, is *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media* (2014), where he distinguishes how meanings and information are transferred among media.²⁰ The result of any transfer is to some degree dependent on the modalities of media, hence, these theories are often juxtaposed in the thesis.

In the discussion about the relation between signs and their function in the media, the thesis refers to the understanding of signs as defined by Charles S. Peirce. Elleström bases his comprehension of meaning and its creation on Peirce’s definition. The following explains the components of a sign:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The

¹⁸ Another modal theory is the one by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication* (London: Arnold, 2001), which have a stronger focus on media communication.

¹⁹ See e.g.: Elleström, 2010, p. 12 & 15.

²⁰ Elleström, Lars, *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.²¹

It should, therefore, be stressed here that meaning can only be an outcome if a person perceives and interprets the sign. Thus, the discussion of meaning in the following analysis is based on the close reading on which I base my observations, and ultimately interpretations. That entails another reader might make another interpretation of the media scrutinized here.

The second part of the analysis is based on a narratological perspective on the mediation of information in a narrative. Because there is so little research into the phenomenon of game novels, there are three different theoretical points of departure for the narrative analysis. They are each applied to the material to test how they can explain the relation between the games and the novels. The first of the theories is Gérard Genette's "study of relationships" between different narrative aspects, as is presented in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.²² Genette's theory is one of the most well-known and wide spread in narratology, hence, it is the starting point for the second part of the analysis. His terms are mainly applied to describe the narrative discourse in the *Mass Effect* novels, and their overall narrative structure. The differentiation between narration and focalization is used to only a smaller degree; Seymour Chatman's definition of the two separate terms for "point of view", "*slant*" and "*filter*", is instead applied in the analysis.²³ Slant defines the narrator's "point of view", and filter defines the character's viewpoint. The interest lies specifically with Chatman's definition of filter as a metaphor for how a character's mind experiences the narrative events, but since not everything is (or can be) depicted, some parts of the information is chosen over others.²⁴ It is explained in further detail in the analysis, for now it suffices to state that interest lies in the filter as an aspect of the relation between the novels and the games.

²¹ Peirce, Charles S., "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs", *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1985), p. 5, [original emphasis].

²² Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980, published originally in French 1972), trans. Jane E. Lewin, p. 27.

²³ Chatman, Seymour, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 143.

²⁴ Chatman, p. 144.

As an extension, Jan-Noël Thon's theory is used to describe the "*the subjective representation of a character's consciousness or mind*".²⁵ He develops this theory in *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, to argue for both the transmedial and medium specific approaches to the representation of subjectivity in contemporary feature films, graphic novels, and video games. For the purpose of this thesis, it is used to expand Chatman's notion of character filter and narrator slant when examining transferred meanings and information as they are subjectively represented by (sometimes different) characters in the *Mass Effect* novels.

1.3.1. Demarcations

Mass Effect is a franchise that encompasses not only digital games, but also a film, novels and comic books. The scope of this thesis limits the research to the relation between the games and novels, more specifically, the relation to the digital game trilogy *Mass Effect*, within the novels by Karpyshyn and Dietz. The game *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (and the novels published in that series) is excluded from the analysis, but is shortly mentioned in relevant discussions. One reason for this is the focus on the novels written by Karpyshyn and Dietz, which were coincidentally published with the games in the series of the trilogy. *Mass Effect: Andromeda* is officially not a part of the trilogy and is thus not as relevant to the investigation here.

In the following analysis, I refer to Karpyshyn's and Dietz's novels in the codex book format, they are, however, also available as e-book and audio-book. The game trilogy is similarly officially available in several platforms: Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows, and PlayStation 3. The experience I have had with *Mass Effect* has been through the second of these. The controlling interface differs between the platforms, as does some of the menus in the games; however, it does not change the content of the games and would thus not create an impact on the discussion below and will therefore be left out.

Most material examples from the novels are chosen from Karpyshyn's novels, and it should be mentioned here that he was in the position of lead writer of the first and second game in the trilogy. Dietz has not, to my knowledge, been involved in the creation of *Mass Effect* any more than *Deception*. There are additional reasons for decreasing that novel's presence from some of the discussions, and they are addressed when relevant. For now, it suffices to state that this study,

²⁵ Thon, Jan-Noël, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), p. 238, [original emphasis].

in parts, centers around Karpysyn's novels. When described as a series however, I do refer to all four texts.

The four novels are officially published with the franchise name, *Mass Effect*, on the front cover, and BioWare on the back, as such, I refrain from analysing the novels from the perspective of fan fiction, or of fan participation, since neither is part of the aim for this study.

1.3.2. Materials

Summary of the novels

The material used in this thesis are the four novels published by the American imprint Del Rey Books (Random House): Drew Karpysyn's *Revelation* (2007), *Ascension* (2008), and *Retribution* (2010) and William C. Dietz's *Deception* (2012). They depict the chronological events of (mainly) David Anderson and Kahlee Sanders, who (along with many others) are also characters in *The Mass Effect Trilogy* that the player gets to know to different extents. The copyright of the first two novels belong to BioWare Corporation and the other two to EA International, these two companies hold the rights to the game trilogy.

Summary of the digital games

The *Mass Effect Trilogy* is so named after the three games, *Mass Effect* (2007), *Mass Effect 2* (2010), and *Mass Effect 3* (2012).²⁶ For the example in this thesis I use the term digital games to include both computer and console platforms.

The games recount the story how of the Reapers, a sentient machine species, threatens the very existence of the galactic community which humankind has recently joined. But one human is determined to stop the Reapers, Commander Shepard. This is the character which the recipient plays, therefore events revolve mainly around Shepard, and their²⁷ friends and allies (and to some extent enemies). The galactic community is centred around a space station called "the Citadel", where the galactic seat of government resides, called "the Council". Three alien species are represented in the Council: the asari, the turians, and the salarians.²⁸ Humanity is invited to a

²⁶ In the following, I use the shortenings: *ME1*, *ME2*, and *ME3*, when referring to the games.

²⁷ The player is, to some degree, free to customize Shepard according to their own taste: sex, appearance, fighting class, and some background story is open for choice.

²⁸ Throughout the games, the terms "race" and "species" are used interchangeably. According to Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/species>, [Retrieved 2018-06-07], species denotes: "A

fourth seat on the Council after the events of *ME1*. Other alien species can (but not all do) hold an embassy on the Citadel, which comes with its benefits and restrictions. The Council have an elite force of special agents, who do not answer to any laws – galactic or local – but only directly to the Council, called “the Spectres” (Special Tactics and Reconnaissance). Shepard is made the first human Spectre in *ME1*. Throughout the games, Shepard, and in extension the recipient, is faced with various dangers and complications on the way to defeat the Reapers.

This science fiction game is played in third person, that is, the recipient’s avatar (Shepard) is visible on the screen in the playable sequences.²⁹ These sequences are heavily defined by action, but there are also cut-scenes which are constituted by the role-playing aspects of the games, making them a mix of action and role-playing games (RPG:s). Because the digital games are designed for the recipient to choose their own path, with some limitations, two playthroughs of the games are unlikely to be identical.³⁰

1.4. Disposition

The second chapter of this thesis, the analysis, is divided into two parts. Part one constitutes a mostly semiotic discussion, whereas part two process narratological topics. This division is made primarily because these novels are a part of a multifaceted phenomenon, which is illuminated by using different perspectives. In both parts, the analysis is initiated with a theoretical delineation of the problematics before moving towards the analysis of the close readings I have made. The thesis is finished with a conclusion, involving a summary of the arguments, and a short discussion of the ramifications of the analysis.

group of living organisms consisting of similar individuals capable of exchanging genes or interbreeding.” Race, on the other hand, means: “A population within a species that is distinct in some way, especially a subspecies.” Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/race>, [Retrieved 2018-06-07]. Hence, I will use the correct term species for the aliens in *Mass Effect* – even though in some of these contexts, the franchise may use the term race – except for quoted usage.

²⁹ Thon term for these sequences is defined as “*rule-governed interactive simulation*” and will be discussed further in the analysis. See: Thon, p. 107.

³⁰ A playthrough is the time it takes to play the games, from the first mission to the last. This can be applied for both one game and for the entire trilogy, since the recipient can transfer the saves from an earlier game to the next, play the “same” Shepard and thus face the consequences of earlier choices.

2. Analysis

2.1. Part 1

2.1.1. The modality of digital games and novels

In the effort of comparing media, one should, according to Elleström, distinguish which, “aspects are relevant to the comparison and exactly how these aspects are related to each other.”³¹ A further distinction should be made between aspects of how the media are perceived and of the materiality of the media in question. (15) These are two motives behind Elleström’s reasoning in establishing what he describes as: “the *material modality*, the *sensorial modality*, the *spatiotemporal modality* and the *semiotic modality*”. (15) These modalities constitute all media, the following pages delineate the novels and the digital games according to them.

The Mass Effect novels

The printed book’s *material modality* is twofold, one part is a three-dimensional object, the other is a two-dimensional surface (usually of paper) on to which text is printed. When discussing the *Mass Effect novels*, I will refer to the latter, that which is printed on the pages, be it pictures or letters.

The sensorial modality consists of the perception (both physical and mental) of the medium. Instead of just discussing the five senses, Elleström identifies three steps of the sensorial modality. Any form of perception “consist of integrated experiences of the way a variety of receptors perceive and interpret an array of sense-data.” (17-18) Reading a printed book therefore entails seeing the text printed on the page, the sense-data here being the light that the receptors in our eyes takes in, becoming signals which the brain then decodes, finally giving us the sensation of seeing. There are, however, more sense-data incepted from the action of reading a printed book, since it is also a three-dimensional object. Some of which have been used to argue against digital book reading (feeling and smelling when reading on an electronic device with a screen is highly different to sensations when reading a printed book).

³¹ Elleström, 2010, p. 15. From here to page 20, references to this work is done with page number in text.

The perception of a medium, the sensations of various sense-data, can be organized in different ways, in coordination with the *spatiotemporal modality*: “Spatiotemporal perception can be said to consist of four dimensions; width, height, depth and time.” (19) The two-dimensional page, upon which text is printed, therefore incorporates two of these: width and height, making it a “*static*” and “*spatial*” medium. The interaction with the text on the page, reading, complicates the matter. Elleström pinpoints the importance of evaluating a medium’s spatiotemporality along with the *semiotic modality*. Decoding language, through the act of reading, involves interpreting signs, which provides reading text both a temporal and a spatial feature. To differentiate these temporal and spatial features of media, Elleström defines three steps of media spatiality: the spatial character of a medium interface, the basic spatial feature of (all forms of) comprehension, and the spatial representation of the medium formed by the recipient’s interpretation. (20) Likewise, there are three steps of media temporality: the temporal character of a medium interface, the essential temporal feature of (all forms of) comprehension, and the temporal representation of the medium in the interpretive mind of the recipient. (21)

Firstly, the two-dimensionality is therefore the spatial characteristic of the text-medium interface, its existence in width and height. There is also an inherent sequentiality involved when reading a printed book, both in the act of reading one sentence after another, and one page after another etc.³² The text-medium interface does not, however, have an intrinsic temporal character because of its constant form, subsequent the printing process. Secondly, perceiving and understanding the text-medium is actualized in both space and time. The third and last step is further called “*virtual space*” and “*virtual time*” by Elleström, which involves the reader’s interpretation of the spatial and temporal representation in the text:

In short, virtual space and virtual time can be said to be manifest in the perception and interpretation of a medium when what is taken to be the *represented* spatiotemporal state is not the same as the spatiotemporal state of the *representing* material modality considered through the spatiotemporal modality. (21, [original emphasis])

The impression of virtual space and virtual time in literature, is created by the dissimilarity between perceiving the *representing* two-dimensionality of the text, while interpreting the

³² See e.g. Elleström, 2010, p. 23.

represented concepts of spatiotemporality in the signs of language. Elleström indicates further, that this goes beyond “abstract, conceptual spatiality”, but also involves “virtual worlds within which the reader can navigate.” (20) For the novels investigated in this thesis, virtual space and time is constituted by the imagination of the recipient.

The *semiotic modality*, is the outcome of the above-mentioned comprehension of media. Elleström refers his understanding of semiotics to the theoretical framework of Charles S. Peirce. (21) “The semiotic modality thus involves the creation of meaning in the spatiotemporally conceived medium by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation.” (22) Interpretation and comprehension of signs from an experienced medium is not necessarily subsequent the perception of that medium, Elleström indicate that the creation of meaning can be simultaneous to the recipient’s perception. (21)

Along with Peirce, but with altered names, Elleström describe three modes of the semiotic modality: “convention (symbolic signs), resemblance (iconic signs) and contiguity (indexical signs)” (22) Written text, like the novels scrutinized here, constitutes a mostly conventional sign function. Elleström points out, however, that “the three modes of signification are always mixed”, an indication that the literary meaning can be interpreted in other ways. (22-23) For instance, “there may also be substantial portions of iconicity in both the visual form of the text and the silent, inner sound experiences produced by the mind.” (23) Some examples of this will be described later in the analysis, in relation to the transferred features of the novels.

The Mass Effect games

The *material modality* of a digital game, “where the senses meet the material impact” (36), the material element which is encountered by the recipient, is primarily made up by the flat surface that is the computer- or TV-screen coupled with various types of sound.

These elements can then be registered by the human senses. Perceiving a digital game involves seeing the light emitted by the screen as well as hearing the soundwaves coming from the sound device connected to the computer. The light and sound waves are the *sense-data*, the first degree of the sensorial modality described by Elleström. Receptors in the recipient’s eyes and ears, register this data, the second degree, which in turn result in perceiving the media, the third degree.

The perception of the various sense-data emitting from the computer, relates to the structures of time and space. As mentioned above, the *spatiotemporal modality* involves width, height, depth and time. In accordance with Elleström's definition of the respectively three steps of media spatiality and temporality, the digital and visual game-interface, firstly, has a similar two-dimensionality in comparison to the printed text. The interface does, however, possess a *partially fixed sequentiality* since the temporal character is inherently changing. Though, this is a general understanding of digital games, which can manifest spatiotemporality in different ways, even within one game. In *Mass Effect*, there are both cut-scenes and player-controlled-sequences, where the former's sequentiality is fixed to a much higher degree than the latter. Thon identifies the importance of considering both "*rule-governed interactive simulation* and *predetermined narrative representation*", which cannot be entirely separated, when discussing the represented storyworld because of "the complex interplay between these two modes of representation."³³ In the *Mass Effect Trilogy* both modes are vital components to the presentation and experience of the games.

Secondly, comprehending any media is dependent on space and time. Digital games clarify these steps of media spatiality and temporality with the recipient using physical controls in space and time to move about in the digital game space.

Thirdly, the two-dimensionality of the screen shares resemblance to the paper, any depth in the interface is an illusion: "The notion of *virtual space* covers the effects of media that are not three-dimensionally spatial on the level of the material interface but that nevertheless receive a spatial character of depth in the perception and interpretation." (20) When playing a digital game, the fact that the gamer can look at an object from 360-degree angle only gives the impression of three-dimensionality.³⁴ Elleström identifies that the (varied) freedom of movement in the computer simulated virtual space creates a distinction from other pictorial illusions of three dimensions. (20) Further, the computer program behind the digital game space, also simulates a progression of time that is dissimilar to the time it takes to play the game. In other games, maybe especially in the simulation genre, this is particularly clear in those where it is possible to alter

³³ Thon, p. 107, [original emphasis].

³⁴ This is of course the result of decades of computer animation development. For a brief historical survey in computer animation, see e.g. Manovich, Lev, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p. 188-195.

the speed of progression.³⁵ In the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, however, the impression a virtual time, is possibly clearest in its combat system. The recipient of the trilogy plays as Commander Shepard, in combat situations he or she has (mostly) two companions in his or her squad. To command them and distribute abilities over the combat zone, there is a user-interface that pauses the game while the gamer/Shepard gives ‘orders’. The time that is *represented* in the game is therefore not the same as the time it takes for the gamer to play the *representing* game. Virtual time, the time belonging to the storyworld differs from the time it takes for the recipient to experience the medium.

The digital games *Mass Effect* consists mainly of images (animated), sounds (music and effects) and language (visual and auditory). Even though it could easily be argued that most digital games are dominated by signs of resemblance, the conventional signs of language (perhaps mainly the dialogue) are also essential to understanding different meanings in the game. The composition of the *three modes of signification* are noticeably blended to a higher extent in the semiotic modality of digital games than that of literature. In the case of the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, the games are highly influenced by their genre. On the one hand, they are RPGs, constituted to a large part by dialogues and cut-scenes where the conventional sign function of language is a dominating force. However, they are also action-based games, with long combat scenes which the recipient largely controls; these scenes are mostly dominated by a resembling sign function in the pictorial presentations of the scenery and the battles.³⁶ There is an additional signifier in the presentation of the digital game that should be mentioned here, the game soundtrack, which is involved in both dialogues, cut-scenes and action scenes (even in the menus). Instrumental music and sound effects alike, have a mostly resembling sign function. (23) It can convey many different meanings which serves to influence the experience of the games.

³⁵ See e.g. Maxis Software’s *The Sims*-franchise, where the player can change the speed of time; it has a normal speed, a fast speed and a very fast speed which the player can alternate between, as well as a pause function. It is much alike ‘fast forwarding’ a video.

³⁶ It should be mentioned, that in ME3, apart from being able to choose the difficulty of the combat, the game allows the gamer to choose between three modes: “Action”, “Role Playing”, and “Story”. The middle one is how the game is “supposed” to be experienced, while the first takes away most choices in the game (in terms of character, dialogue etc.), and the last makes the combat extremely easy (for anyone not so interested in combat).

Comparison and Summary

There are several ways in which the representations of the *Mass Effect* universe differ. One reason for this drastic difference is the multimodality of digital games. The novels do as well inhere a certain multimodality, Elleström argues that “all media are multimodal as far as the temporal and the semiotic modalities are concerned”. (24) However, the digital games of *Mass Effect*, are multimodal regarding all four modalities, which is demonstrated in the above account.

Differences can be found already in the material modality; digital games are multimodal (moving and still pictures, and sound) whereas novels are not (at least if one only considers the text). Continuing from this, the sensorial modality of digital games is therefore also multimodal because the multilayered material modality creates more sense-data to be perceived. But even if only focusing on the visual aspect of a two-dimensional surface, novels and digital games are highly different in the spatiotemporal modality. The former’s interface is static, and the latter possess a partially fixed sequentiality. The notions of virtual space and virtual time involve further differences between novels and digital games; the former gives the impression of a three-dimensional space and change over time that exists solely in the imagination of the recipient, whereas the latter simulates an impression of virtual space and virtual time in their representation. Lastly, as Elleström has pinpointed, since all media are multimodal on the semiotic modality, both novels and digital games are combinations of conventional, resembling and contiguous signs. The combinations are, however, not identical to each other, much because the media are different on the other modal levels. The relation between the different modalities and the sign functions in both media, and how this affects the transfer of information between the media, will be discussed in the end of part one.

2.1.2. Transferring a storyworld

Different forms of media

When analysing media, one should differentiate between what Elleström defines as “basic media”, “qualified media” and “technical media”. It could be considered as different dimensions of media, where the first two refer to the immaterial classifications of media. The two-dimensional text is in this way the *basic media*, because its modal characteristics is its principal aspect of identification. (27) Further, the text scrutinized here, belongs to the classification of

fictional literature, here the genre of novels, which is a *qualified medium*. The materiality of a medium belongs to the classification of *technical medium* (which is not the same as the material modality), in this case the page in a book. In comparison, the qualified medium of digital games (which, I should remark, is in common discourse called video games) consist of several basic media, where literature generally consist of one basic media, namely tactile text. Some types of literature include other basic media, like still pictures in the form of illustrations. Most books, like the ones under scrutiny here, includes paratextual pictures, which certainly do not fill the same function as illustrations but should still be mentioned. The basic media of digital games include still and moving animated pictures, tactile and auditory text, and various forms of sound (which includes the auditory text, and others such as the soundtrack). The technical media here is the computer or tv-console-set (with all other necessary devices connected) which, “mediates, in the sense that it ‘realizes’ and ‘displays’ basic and qualified media.” (30) Just like the computer is a technical medium which both visually and auditory present the digital game, it is correspondingly possible to understand the tactile text on a page as technically presenting literature.

Defining the storyworld: Movement between games and novels

When posing the question of what gets transferred in the novels, it was phrased with consideration to the complication of assuming that something is transferred, moved, from one medium to another. Ordering the novels alongside the digital games is slightly problematic if one argues for how something is moved from a source to a target, as many adaptations studies do. The usual way of ordering is by publication date, that classification renders *Revelation* as the source since it was published first of the media products in the franchise.³⁷ The fact that Karpyshyn is the author of three of the four novels, and lead writer in *ME1* and *ME2*, further complicates any discussion of moving information from the “original” to the “version”. While this thesis is not a study in adaptation, it takes inspiration of Bruhn’s argument for adaptation as a “two-way process”, what he defines as “dialogizing adaptation studies”.³⁸ Thus, when

³⁷ See Elleström, 2014, p. 21: “Media products represent and transmediate both other media products and qualified media.”

³⁸ Bruhn, Jørgen, “Dialogizing adaptation studies: From one-way transport to a dialogic two-way process”, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik & Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 73. His formula on same page: “*Novel to film adaptation studies is the*

analysing the transfer of the storyworld in the novels by Karpyshyn and Dietz, it is the relationship between the media which is of primary interest, the *dialogue* between the media.

Differing from novelizations of films, which often work from the film script or other forms of text production behind the film's story,³⁹ the novels under scrutiny in this thesis do not (directly) adapt the story of the game trilogy. The novels are not an adaptation of the same narrative events that take place in the digital games, they do however, belong to the same series which was published between 2007 and 2015.⁴⁰ Later publications (with narrative content) belong to another series within the same universe, that of *Mass Effect: Andromeda*.⁴¹ There are some important differences here though, most obviously presented in the names; the digital games referred to in this thesis, often called the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, are named according to the order in which they were released, *Mass Effect* (2007), *Mass Effect 2* (2010), *Mass Effect 3* (2012). The fourth game, *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017), keeps the franchise name but is not presented as *Mass Effect 4* and therefore, refrains from being part of the same series.⁴² Lev Manovich suggest that the media industry's commonly used term, property, can also be understood as "prototype".⁴³ Thus, the prototype can generate differing variants which are combined by a shared name (*Mass Effect* in the examples of this thesis). One publication will often be "treated as the source of the 'data,' with others positioned as being derived from this source. Typically, the version that is in the same media as the original 'property' is treated as the source."⁴⁴ In this understanding, the novels by Karpyshyn and Dietz, qualify as "product tie-ins"⁴⁵ which further present themselves as belonging to the same property with the naming: *Mass Effect: Revelation*, *Mass Effect: Ascension*, *Mass Effect: Retribution* and *Mass Effect: Deception*.

The name of the intellectual property, *Mass Effect*, implies a further connection, that of a common world in which the different media texts situate themselves. Marie-Laure Ryan defines

systematic study of the process of novels being turned into film, focusing on both the change of the content and form from novel to film and the changes being inferred on the originating text." [original emphasis]

³⁹ Baetens, Jan, "Novelization, a Contaminated Genre", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2005), trans. Pieter Vermeulen, p. 46.

⁴⁰ See Rosenqvist, p. 25.

⁴¹ I mean "universe" in a literal sense here, the *Mass Effect Trilogy* takes place in the Milky Way galaxy, while *Mass Effect: Andromeda* takes place in, well, the Andromeda galaxy. But it is still the same universe.

⁴² While there is a shared storyworld between what you could roughly call the *Trilogy Series* and the *Andromeda Series*, the latter will be left out here due to the demarcations of this thesis.

⁴³ Manovich, p. 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

in “Texts, Worlds, Stories: Narrative Worlds as Cognitive and Ontological Concept” a new narratological practice of the term “world” (in contrast to earlier usage in authorial contexts), namely: “the world of a story – literally a ‘storyworld.’ It combines a spatial dimension, the setting, and a temporal dimension, the narrative events.”⁴⁶

In the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, the recipient plays as Commander Shepard, hence, the narrative follows the story in which Shepard faces the threat of the Reapers. *Revelation*, *Ascension*, *Retribution* and *Deception* do not portray these events. They do, however, take place in the same space and time as the game trilogy; that is, they share both a spatial and temporal dimension. For example, the first novel functions as a prequel to the series (about twenty years before the events of *ME1*), and the second novel is situated shortly after *ME1* which provides a good understanding for *ME2*. The paratextual cues inform the reader that these books are “based on”, or “inspired by” the digital game. Regarding these cues, if the recipient is both a reader and a gamer, they will encounter various mutual storyworld elements in both media. However, there will also be differences.

The subject matter which is moved between the two different qualified media, novels and digital games, is defined as “media characteristics” by Elleström in *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media* (2014). The term constitutes “information and meaning mediated by separate media” which “may be transferred to other media”, and it forms the foundation for Elleström’s study.⁴⁷ He argues for the use of “the term *intermedial* to broadly refer to all types of relations among different types of media” and further that “the term *transmedial* should be understood to refer to intermedial relations that are characterized by actual or potential transfers.”⁴⁸ The storyworld *Mass Effect* is, therefore, distinguished by the transfer of pieces of information and meanings between the various qualified media and media products involved in the franchise.

⁴⁶ Ryan, Marie-Laure, “Texts, Worlds, Stories: Narrative Worlds as Cognitive and Ontological Concept”, *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media: Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds*, ed. Hatavara, Mari; Hyvärinen, Matti; Mäkelä, Maria; Mäyrä, Frans, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Elleström, 2014, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Transferring a Narrative: Different representations of a story

The transfer of narrative, of a story, is often the centre point in adaptation analyses.⁴⁹ They commonly revolve around questions such as how a story changes when transferred between qualified media and the implications for the represented story with these changes in media. This focus provides an explanation to adaptation studies interest in novel to film analyses, when a literary text transforms to film, which have been a dominating force in the field of intermedia studies but can currently “claim to be a separate field unto itself, worthy of the prominence that specialized journals would afford it.”⁵⁰ In the context of digital games there are of course examples of adaptations of story, film to game adaptation has become a common subject matter for debates.⁵¹ The representation of a story can, however, be presented in a variety of ways.

Revelation was published in May 2007, six months prior to the release of *Mass Effect*.⁵² The novel tells the story of David Anderson, a Systems Alliance marine, in his early(er) career as Lieutenant and executive officer aboard a ship called the *SSV Hastings*, a patrol vessel in the Skyllian Verge, an unclaimed part of the galaxy that humanity has started to colonize. They receive a distress call from a research facility on Sidon that has been attacked by an unknown force. After leading a team to investigate the attack, Anderson is chosen by his superiors to continue the investigation and search of the guilty person(s). The attack proves to be more complex than expected, leading to unforeseen complications in the case. This story is also told in *ME1* by Anderson himself to Commander Shepard, when asked. In dialogue he presents his history with the Council Spectre, Saren Arterius, the main villain in *ME1*.

We had intel on a rogue scientist being funded by batarian interests. He was trying to set up a facility to develop illegal AI technology out in the Verge. Alliance intel had done all the work, but the Council wanted a Spectre involved. We compromised: I was assigned to help Saren in his investigation. We tracked the scientist to a refining facility on Camala. He was hidden away somewhere inside, protected

⁴⁹ See e.g. Elliott, Kamilla, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Palmer, R. Barton, “Review Article: *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, Numbers 1.1, 1.2 (Intellect), Richard J. Hand and Katja Krebs, eds.”, *Adaptation*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2009), p. 87, doi: 10.1093/adaptation/app001.

⁵¹ For an example of a game to novel where the story is closely adapted, see e.g. Dietz, William C., *Halo: The Flood* (New York: Del Rey, 2003), which adapts the story of *Halo: Combat Evolved* (2001).

⁵² “Mass Effect: Revelation”, Mass Effect Wiki, http://masseffect.wikia.com/wiki/Mass_Effect:_Revelation [Retrieved 2018-03-08].

by an army of batarian mercenaries. The plan was simple: sneak into the plant, capture the scientist, sneak back out. Quick, quiet, and a minimum of bloodshed.⁵³

For the recipient of *Mass Effect*, this dialogue and the novel *Revelation* provide insight into Anderson's past and persona, a vital task considering his frequent appearances in the franchise and the role he plays in the greater conflict within the overarching story. The story is summarized in the digital game and told in auditory dialogue, the basic media accounting this being verbal organized sound. Subtitles to the dialogue is an option to the gamer, becoming – if turned on – another basic media, *digital* text. The qualified medium, the digital game, could of course present this history with moving pictures, instead the game relies on auditory dialogue. The account of Anderson's and Saren's history in *ME1* demonstrates the difference between these two different qualified media, where literature in a book provides more space for the basic media tactile text than digital games do. This is partly to do with convention. Elleström defines qualified media as such because they “rely strongly on the two qualifying aspects”, “*the contextual qualifying aspect*” and the “*operational qualifying aspect*” of media.⁵⁴ The contextual qualifying aspect defines different media roots and applications in distinct cultural and historical contexts, while the operational qualifying aspect involves “aesthetic and communicative characteristics.”⁵⁵ Convention in games, particularly in the genre of RPG, makes a narrative account of events better told in dialogue, one character to another. The same summary, told by Anderson in *ME1*, would turn out short in a novel. Typically, novels are qualified media made for telling longer and more detailed accounts of events in tactile text than digital games' use of (auditory or visual) dialogue. That being said, RPGs roots in text based tabletop role-playing games and early adventure games like the MUD-genre, have left some traces in modern RPGs in the form of digital texts in games like *Mass Effect*.⁵⁶ Since the *Mass Effect Trilogy* was first released over ten years ago, at the time of writing this thesis, some remains of the text based games are still to be found. One interface in *Mass Effect* that is built by the basic medium text, is the in-game Codex that can be found in all three games.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Mass Effect*, BioWare/Electronic Arts, 2007, PC (ported by Demiurge Studios), Mission: “Citadel: Expose Saren”.

⁵⁴ Elleström, 2010, p. 24-27, [original emphasis].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

⁵⁶ An abbreviation for multi-user dungeon, which was a popular genre during the eighties. For more on MUD's, see e.g. Aarseth, 1997, p. 142-161.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Kristiansson.

An interesting third appearance of the same story (Anderson's history with Saren) can be found in the "Zakera Cafe" on the Citadel, a location that can be visited in *ME2*. There the gamer can, in the role of Shepard, purchase two publications: *Revelation* and *Ascension*. The in-game Codex gives this account on *Revelation*:

Revelation is a popular military-historical novel by the human writer Drew Karpysyn that dramatizes human conflicts and political expansion following the 2148 discovery of the Prothean mass relay on Pluto and the beginning of human galactic exploration. In 2165, years before his rise to political prominence, Lt. David Anderson was a young veteran of the turian war,⁵⁸ investigating the destruction of top secret military research station Shanxi. Every scientist stationed at Shanxi had been slaughtered except Kahlee Sanders, who'd disappeared with secret files making her Anderson's prime suspect. The book traced Anderson's dangerous investigation of Sanders, which included run-ins with Blue Suns mercenaries and a krogan bounty hunter. The investigation uncovered illegal research into AI, and forced Anderson into an alliance with human-hating turian Spectre Saren Arterius, who would eventually enter into a genocidal collaboration with the geth.⁵⁹

With the exception for confusing Sidon and Shanxi (the former being the one in the "actual" *Revelation* novel), this entry provides a well-informed summary of *Revelation*. The Codex-entry on *Ascension* provides a similar summary of events, making both entries an amusing reference for anyone who has knowledge of the novels outside the game, and furthermore, an official reference to anyone who has not read or heard of the novels.

The confusion between the names proves an important point when transferring information between different media texts, changes will be made, sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional. Elleström argues that transfers of media characteristics "always involves transformation to some degree: something is kept, something is added, and something is removed."⁶⁰ Even though all three representations of the story of how Anderson met Saren are based on some form of text,⁶¹ changes are still made when transferring it. Furthermore, the

⁵⁸ Also known as the "First Contact War".

⁵⁹ *Mass Effect 2*, BioWare/Electronic Arts, 2010, PC. Will after purchase be available for reading in Codex, entry: "Publications"; "Revelation".

⁶⁰ Elleström, 2014, p. 10.

⁶¹ "A text, then, is any object with the primary function to relay verbal information." Aarseth, p. 62.

verbal accounts in the different qualified media are bound to certain conventions, causing some of the obvious and inevitable dissimilarities in the stories.

Transferring a Storyworld: Different representations of a galactic civilization

In adaptation studies, the presupposed shared aspect when transferring between media is the story, or narrative events.⁶² Nevertheless, the events of how Anderson came to meet Saren – which is narrated in both *ME1* and *Revelation*, and referenced to in *ME2* – is the exception and not the rule in the relation between the *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the novels. This relation demonstrates (as is shown in the following) that information which is moved between media is not necessarily between two narrative accounts of the “same” history. Linda Hutcheon describes several other aspects which can be transferred between media, story aspects such as: “its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on.”⁶³ Although Hutcheon demonstrates an awareness of other aspects of media adaptations, she does prioritize adaptations of stories in *A Theory of Adaptation*. She acknowledges, however, that: “when it came to analyzing videogame adaptations, I realized that it was less the story itself than the story world, or what I called the ‘heterocosm’ (literally, another cosmos), that was being adapted.”⁶⁴

Hutcheon’s term *heterocosm* shares of course many similarities with Ryan’s *storyworld*, however, it is the latter term which is used in this analysis. Ryan defines a storyworld as “an imagined totality that evolves according to the events in the story.”⁶⁵ The *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the novels portray the same world, which exists across several stories in different media.⁶⁶ The transmediality of this universe has already been stated elsewhere,⁶⁷ and is a given fact for the following account of the storyworld of *Mass Effect* as a transmedial element in the franchise.

Transmediality can be approached, argues Mark J. P. Wolf, in two directions, through adaptation or growth. The latter proves most relevant here, with the definition: “when another

⁶² Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. Epilogue by Siobhan O’Flynn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 10.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. xxiv.

⁶⁵ Ryan, 2016, p. 13.

⁶⁶ The world is commonly referred to as the *Mass Effect* universe. An example of the use of this term is Casey Hudson and Derek Watts’ graphic book, *The Art of the Mass Effect Universe* (2012), published by Dark Horse who also published the comics in the franchise.

⁶⁷ See Rosenqvist.

medium is used to present new canonical material of a world, expanding the world and what we know about it.”⁶⁸ Thus, when novels are used to present the storyworld of *Mass Effect*, but portraying different stories, they are *expanding* the storyworld.

Description

One common theme to the storyworld of *Mass Effect*, which the novels expand, is the galactic scene, or maybe more appropriately, the galactic civilization. It contains various sorts of information and meanings which are transferred between the media.⁶⁹ This includes the various alien species that, along with humanity, populate the galaxy. The novels’ descriptions differ, of course, from the pictorial visualizations of these aliens in the games. In Wolf’s definition of *description* as one of five “processes of transformation”,⁷⁰ he concludes that it is particularly convenient in cases where there is already a visual model, which can have an alluding function in the verbal description. He continues: “Even if the written works introduce new characters, locations, and objects, the style and aesthetics of the existing visual imagery will still be able to carry over and influence how the new material will be envisioned in the imagination of the audience.”⁷¹ Thus, when a twenty-year-old Anderson is described in the beginning of *Revelation*, any recipient who has previously played *ME1*⁷² will be able to refer to his visual depiction when reading the following:

The lieutenant was a tall man, six foot three according to his file. At twenty years old he was just starting to fill out his large frame, still growing into his broad chest and wide, square shoulders. His skin was dark brown, his black hair cut high and tight in accordance with Alliance regulations.⁷³

⁶⁸ Wolf, Mark J. P., *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 245-246.

⁶⁹ Elleström, 2014, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Wolf, p. 250. The others are: “visualization (adaptation into images or objects), auralization (adaptation into sounds), interactivation (adaptation into interactive media), and deinteractivation (adaptation moving from interactive media to noninteractive media).”

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁷² Or *ME3*, for that matter. Though, he does not appear a lot in *ME2*.

⁷³ Karpysyn, 2007, p. 14-15.



Mass Effect 3, BioWare/Electronic Arts, 2012, PC

The alien species, which are an important feature in the galactic civilization portrayed in the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, are presented in a similar manner to Anderson's description. However, the representation of aliens further demonstrates some complications when being transferred between the multimodal digital games, and verbal literature in the form of novels, as is discussed in the analysis below.

Multimodality

The multimodality of digital games in all four aspects of modality provides difference beyond the “visual” game and the “textual” novel. For example, the moving pictures of turians in the *Mass Effect Trilogy* are accompanied by sound, giving them an auditory representation as well as visual. All turians have a distinct sound when they speak, something which could not be auditorily represented in a tactile text, nor is there any description in the novels, which could be used to depict the sound with tactile text. It is, nevertheless, one feature among others that makes turians unique in the games, a distinctive characteristic which is not found in the novels. Another essential difference is found in the concept of virtual space, which makes a visual representation of the turian species acutely different in the games and in the novels. As mentioned before, the

novels notion of virtual space does exist, yet only in the imagination of the recipient. The visual representations of turians in the games are a digitally simulated notion of virtual space. This is the difference it makes: “She saw several turians among the crowd, their features largely obscured by the hard, tattooed carapaces of flesh and bone that covered their heads and faces like fierce pagan masks.”⁷⁴ This is a description of a feature distinct to turians, however, the representation only evokes an image in the recipient’s imagination, it does not simulate it as the virtual space of the games does.



Mass Effect 3, BioWare/Electronic Arts, 2012, PC

Here, it is important to mark the difference between a static picture and that of the digital game-simulation. The latter constitutes not only a partially fixed sequentiality in cut-scenes – which can (with some limitations) show a turian from many more angles and distances than one picture – but furthermore, a distinctly less partially fixed sequentiality in the player-controlled-

⁷⁴ Karpysyn, 2007, p. 60-61.

sequences, where the gamer can choose how much to know and see of turians.⁷⁵ The combination of the “*rule-governed interactive simulation*” and the “*predetermined narrative representation*”⁷⁶ can create a highly nuanced representation, depending on the approach in which the recipient interacts with the former and interpretation of the latter.

These aliens – their history, culture, physical appearances and behaviours – are all important parts of the franchise wide theme of the galactic community. The representations of these turians in different media are inevitably different, Elleström concludes that “modal differences make transferring vital information impossible without *transforming* it...”⁷⁷ As mentioned above, there is no representation of the voices of turians in the novels, and even if there were, modal differences between the media would render it very different. Correspondingly, the visual representations also create inevitable differences, as is shown in the above paragraph.

Representation of content

However, any similarities or dissimilarities among the various representations of the aliens in *Mass Effect* depend not just on similarities or dissimilarities in the modality modes. Elleström addresses the information that is transmediated or represented as, “compound media characteristics: cognitive entities represented by media”.⁷⁸ Two media texts that are represented in the same media, with the same modalities, can therefore still be different because of their different presentations of compound media characteristics.⁷⁹ The compound media characteristics of an alien species called the turians is, nevertheless, evoked more or less similarly by the representation in both games and novels. The short quote above and picture both represent a unique “alienness” to turians, the hard yet tattooed faces. While differences are inevitable, because of several modality differences between games and novels, recipients of the *Mass Effect* franchise will still refer to the alien on the screen or in the description in the tactile text as turian. Elleström argues for the importance of cognitively comprehending likeness despite any dissimilarities involved. Likeness will, in this way, surmount over dissimilarities in media:

⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the word-processing program I am writing in cannot recreate the interactive medium of *Mass Effect*, due to its technical limitations, so I guess the reader will have to either take my word or play the game themselves.

⁷⁶ Thon, p. 107.

⁷⁷ Elleström, 2014, p. 38, [my emphasis].

⁷⁸ Ibid. For a definition of the two forms of media transformations, “transmediation” and “media representation”, see e.g. p. 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

“these different types of mediation may trigger representations of compound media characteristics that are understood to be the same, albeit not perfectly identical.”⁸⁰

Thon proposes an understanding of media texts that move between media as one of “filling in the gaps” and “ignoring” elements of a narrative representation which are logically impossible in their context.⁸¹ Thus, when faced with a logically inconsistent representation of an element belonging to the storyworld, the recipient fills in the gaps if something is missing, and ignores elements which do not support the previously established logic. Dietz’ novel *Deception* has for this reason been left to margins of this thesis, it contains many logical contradictions with the rest of the storyworld, and would not have the same illuminating function as examples from Karpyshyn’s novels. However, if the recipient discerns the likeness in the storyworld which *Deception* portrays, the contradictory elements can be ignored for the purpose of comprehending the storyworld as it moves between media.

Regarding the case of the representation of turians in the digital games and, alternatively, in the novels, the likeness will motivate the recipient to comprehend the information about the turians as the same alien species in the *Mass Effect* universe. Additional information about other alien species in the novels, as well as other similar information they share with the digital games, together create this universe. Elleström argues for a reinstatement of the concept of form and content, because the dichotomy is: “fundamental for our minds when we make sense of all types of nonmaterial phenomena and when we form ideas and concepts...”⁸² The information about turians, the idea of this alien species – although different in its various representations – manifests the content that when combined with other pieces of content, creates the storyworld of *Mass Effect*. Elleström concludes that: “Content may be understood as ‘entities’ and form may be understood as ‘relations between entities’. Whereas form is sometimes indisputably based on exterior qualities, it is also always a creation of the interpreting mind and its inclination to perceive coherent shapes.”⁸³ The formulation of the storyworld therefore constitutes connections between the various pieces of content (Elleström’s *entities*). Thus, information such as the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁸¹ Thon, p. 61.

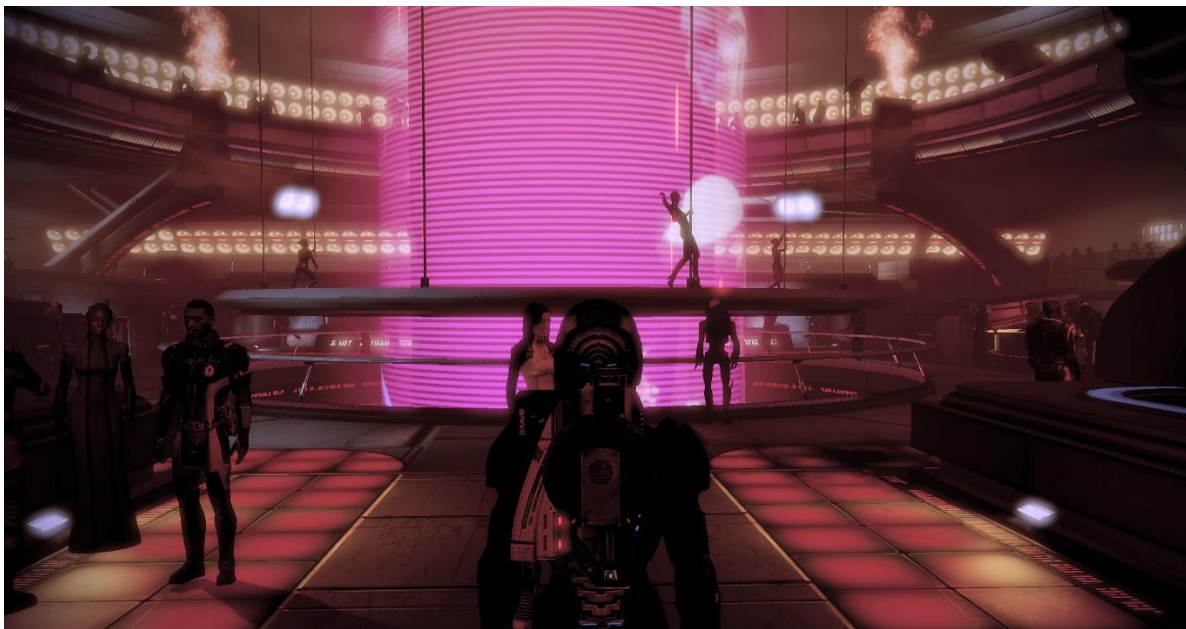
⁸² Elleström, 2014, p. 40.

For a summary of the form-content-debate, see Elliott, 2003, p. 134: “From Walter Pater, to Ferdinand Saussure, to New Critics and structuralists, scholars remain adamant that form does not and cannot separate from content. /.../ Word/image and form/content dogmas thus conspire to render adaptation a theoretical impossibility.”

⁸³ Elleström, 2014, p. 40.

various alien species, are vital pieces of content that is frequently transferred between the games and the novels. The common setting between the different media makes locations another compound media characteristics that is often transferred between the two.

The club consisted of four levels, each one made up of a large outer ring surrounding a square dance floor suspended by wires and walkways in the centre. Each of the various levels appealed to its own particular crowd, with its own dance floor, unique musical style, and custom drinks and chemical recreations.⁸⁴



Mass Effect 2, BioWare/Electronic Arts, 2010, PC

The recipient who has visited this club (called Afterlife), as Commander Shepard in the virtual space of *Mass Effect*, will comprehend this description as more or less similar to that of *ME2* and *ME3*, and will therefore add this description to their overall experience of *Mass Effect*.⁸⁵ How much any description of the *Mass Effect* content differs between the media, varies largely depending on the different media texts.⁸⁶ Additionally, since the recipients themselves will

⁸⁴ Karpysyn, 2010, p. 38.

⁸⁵ Afterlife is not featured in *ME1* because the story does not lead Shepard to that part of the galaxy. It, could of course, be argued that it was not yet created at the time of producing *ME1* and writing *Revelation*.

⁸⁶ As has been shorty mentioned, Dietz' novel contain several logical inconsistencies, which in part involves descriptions that do not add up with other depictions.

experience the game trilogy differently, their experiences of the content in the novels will also differ, largely depending on the recipient's approach to the rule-governed interactive simulation. The alien species, the various locations and technology etc., entails a relationship between the various pieces, which combined generate the theme of galactic civilization. This theme is a transferred compound media characteristic in the franchise, which Elleström accentuates as incorporating "both entities and structural relations."⁸⁷ It results in the idea of a storyworld, where this theme is prominent in several different media products. Elleström concludes that "plots and stories" are two aspects which can be transferred when a narrative is represented in differing media.⁸⁸ The analysis here has established that those two aspects are not commonly transferred between the *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the novels, there is something else. The storyworld is another aspect which Elleström defines that, "should count as form and includes an elaborate virtual space, may be at least partly transferred among different media."⁸⁹ The characteristics of the storyworld which are transferred in the novels refers to the presentations in the games, resulting in a connected representation. Whether or not the information is identical, the connections create the form of the *Mass Effect* storyworld. Different recipients will have differing interpretations of the connections and therefore, the form of the storyworld will vary between various interpretations.

2.1.3. End discussion: Form and content in relation to the concept of a storyworld

Likeness will, as was delineated earlier, overcome dissimilarities in representations of compound media characteristics, because likeness encourages comprehension of uniformity in the recipient's interpretation. In the interpretation of signs there are, according to Peirce, three sign relations, which Elleström uses in the formation of the three modes of the semiotic modality.⁹⁰ The section about the modalities of media accounted for the predominantly conventional sign functions in the novels in question here, while the digital games possess a mixture of conventional and resembling sign functions. However, even though literature is dominated by the conventional sign function, Elleström proposes that it further contains "substantial portions of iconicity in both the visual form of the text and the silent, inner sound experiences produced by

⁸⁷ Elleström, 2014, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See Peirce.

the mind.”⁹¹ How do these blends of sign functions impact the interpretation of similarities between the different representations?

Revelation (and the other novels) provide several other descriptions of the turian species than the one mentioned earlier. In the quote below, Anderson realizes his own alienness when walking into a bar where the human is the outsider:

A pair of turians fixed their avian eyes on him, following his every move like hawks ready to swoop down on an unsuspecting mouse. Turians were roughly the same height as humans, but much thinner. Their bones were slender and their frames were sharp and angular. Their three-fingered hands looked almost like talons, and their heads and faces were covered by a rigid mask of brown-gray cartilage and bone, which they tended to mark with striping and tribal tattoos. /.../ Looking at turians always reminded Anderson of the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and birds.⁹²

The metaphor of birds in this quote is based on the similarity Anderson is experiencing between those avian creatures and turians.⁹³ Since Anderson and the reader of *Revelation* probably shares a common notion of birds (and their characteristics), the reader can use this metaphor in the comprehension of turians when mentally constructing the virtual space of the *Mass Effect* storyworld. The reader might have played the game (or seen footage of it) and already has a mental image of the alien species turians, and can thus refer to that experience. In this case, the bird-like character of turians in above description, can function to overcome any dissimilarities that the recipient might experience (if they agree on the bird-like character of turians, that is). A reader that has not experienced any of the *Mass Effect* games before reading the novel, might use the metaphor in an initial mental visualization of turians by alluding to the bird-like characteristics. The common notion of birds involves, when reading this metaphor, interpreting a sign constituted by convention, that which Peirce calls the symbolic sign function of language. Peirce addresses this type of sign as “an association of general ideas”⁹⁴, which the novel alludes

⁹¹ Elleström, 2010, p. 23.

⁹² Karpysyn, 2007, p. 103.

⁹³ Stankiewicz, Edward, “Linguistics and the Study of Poetic Language”, *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1960), p. 72: “Metaphor develops the meaning of terms along the line of semantic similarity /.../”

Definition by Peirce, p. 10, [original emphasis]: “those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*.”

⁹⁴ Peirce, p. 8.

to by describing “their avian eyes”, slender figure, and talon-like-hands. However, while the verbal metaphor of bird-like appearance might be built on a conventional sign function of language, the pictorial depiction of turians in the digital games relies on the (visual) resemblance between turians and birds. The visual form of the tactile text does not embody a resembling sign function in its meaning. Nevertheless, I would argue that the metaphor is not only referencing to a resembling sign which exists within the digital games through conventions of language, but that it furthermore creates a resembling sign with the similarity to birds in the virtual space which exists within the recipient’s imagination. The multimodality in literature, in concern to the semiotic modality, is therefore grounded on the mixture between conventional and resembling sign functions, here in the representations of storyworld elements such as turians, which embodies the recipient’s mental creation of a virtual space. Metaphorical use of language thus allows for the characteristic of turians to be transferred in the novels, without losing the resembling sign function of the games. The form is changed, but not the content.

Apart from Elleström, Jørgen Bruhn has additionally demonstrated literature’s multimodality in its semiotic construction and interpretation. His example establishes the mixture of conventional signs (which language is usually attributed with) with a “sound-iconic” sign function, as well as a visual resembling sign function, in literature.⁹⁵ This is also resonant in some of the transferred media characteristics of the *Mass Effect* storyworld. The thesis previously mentioned, however shortly, sound effects impact on the experience of the *Mass Effect Trilogy*. The novel *Ascension* use this sound-resembling sign function to relate to a sound effect in the games. Doors are described to have “whooshed open”⁹⁶ and “swooshed shut”.⁹⁷ This is a referential representation⁹⁸ of the sound effect that is characteristic of the automated doors in the *Mass Effect* games, which do make a “whooshing” sound.

The effect of the reference is additionally enhanced in the visual tactile text which is italicized, a sign function which is conventional, most (western) readers know that italics is a form of emphasizing words and sentences. Part two will describe additional examples of italicized text when visually differentiating directly represented thoughts from other text. With

⁹⁵ Bruhn, Jørgen, “Heteromediaity”, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 228.

⁹⁶ Karpysyn, 2008, p. 23, [original emphasis].

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 88, [original emphasis].

⁹⁸ See e.g. Walton, Kendal L., *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 112-114.

the example of “*whoosh*”, however, the visual differentiation illustrates the resemblance between reading “*whoosh*” and hearing a whooshing sound. Resembling sign functions of both auditory and visual properties are thus combined in “*whoosh*” to create a sign which effectively refers to an archetypal sign in the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, a sign which holds a meaning typical for science fiction. Common practice in the interpretation of the sign is of course based on a conventional sign function, which establishes how interconnected the sign functions are, in literature as in digital games.

Both examples of the bird-metaphor and the reference to a sound effect, keeps vital parts of the contents in the characteristic features, though the form is changed. David Herman pinpoint that, “stories are shaped but not determined by their presentational formats.”⁹⁹ The tactile text of literature unquestionably *shape* the storyworld elements of *Mass Effect* in Karpyshyn’s and Dietz’ novels, however, they are not regulated by their presentation.

2.2. Part 2

2.2.1. Introduction to transmedia storytelling

In an attempt to understand the universe of *Mass Effect*, and how the novels of Karpyshyn and Dietz place themselves in this universe, this thesis will turn its attention towards the field of narratology, and more specifically transmedia narratology. Henry Jenkins defines in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* narratives that cross media borders as “transmedia storytelling”, which “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.”¹⁰⁰ In the chapter “Searching for the Origami Unicorn” Jenkins characterize *The Matrix* franchise as transmedia storytelling. The *Mass Effect* franchise shares many of these characteristics, as addressed by Rosenqvist in her thesis. She concludes that there were most releases of narrative texts coinciding with the release of *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Herman, David, “Toward a Transmedial Narratology”, *Narrative across media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 95-96.

¹⁰¹ Rosenqvist, p. 31.

Drew Karpysyn, the author of *Revelation* (2007), *Ascension* (2008), and *Retribution* (2010) and lead writer of *Mass Effect* (2007) and *Mass Effect 2* (2010), provides some insight to the structures in both creating and reading his transmedia stories.

Because it's a prequel, I wasn't locked into a simplified retelling of the story we present in the game. /.../ Instead, I was able to focus on fleshing out the universe of Mass Effect by telling a story that will give readers a deeper understanding of the setting. I also give you a closer look at some of the key characters from the game, adding to the overall experience. It isn't necessary to play the game to read the novel (or vice versa), because both the game and the novel tell their own unique story with enough details about the *Mass Effect* universe to stand on their own. I was also careful to avoid major spoilers so it won't matter which story you encounter first. I'm confident *Revelation* will provide the kind of story Mass Effect fans will want in a novel – something that doesn't negate their experience playing the game, but adds to the overall universe.¹⁰²

Karpysyn's report on *Revelation* fits into the model that Jenkins describes about different media texts in a franchise. "In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best", each media text should therefore "be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa."¹⁰³ This sense of independence is highlighted in the above quote by Karpysyn, at the point of the release of *Revelation* and *ME1*, both texts were sufficiently autonomous from each other for the recipient of the franchise to gain entry through both texts. Even though Anderson does tell his history with Saren to Shepard in *ME1* (example made in previous section), this is a minor sequence in the game, one which might not be present in every playthrough of the game, since the recipient might just not to ask Anderson that many questions about his past. In this short summary, no details are spoiled except for the larger structure of the novel's story. And because the novel takes place almost two decades before the first game, any spoilers for the game are easily avoided.

Jenkins further emphasize the diverse experiences recipients can have of a franchise, depending on how many media texts they have encountered in a franchise. The rule of experience that Jenkins argues for is: "The whole is worth more than the sum of the parts."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Karpysyn, Drew, "Mass Effect: Revelation", http://drewkarpysyn.com/c/?page_id=7 [Retrieved 2018-03-13].

¹⁰³ Jenkins, p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Jenkins, p. 102.

This idea that transmedia storytelling is not just about the amount of media products in the franchise, but how they create an entity, is reflected in Karpyshyn's description of his novel as an addition of the universe.

2.2.2. The narrative style of the novels

Narrative discourse and relations

Genette begins his now famous work, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, with describing it as “a study of relationships”, how the different elements of a narrative relate to each other. He delineates the following terms: “*story* for the signified or narrative content”, “*narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself” and lastly “*narrating* for the producing narrative action”.¹⁰⁵ In a similar attempt I will use *story* (which is sometimes called history, or narrated events), *narrative* as the text and *narrating* for the condition in which the story is presented.

To start investigating the stories in these novels, I begin with the narrating conditions which Genette explains in three divisions: “*time of narrating*, *narrative level*, and ‘*person*’ (that is, relations between the narrator – plus, should the occasions arise, his or their narrate[s]-and the story he tells).” (215) All four novels considered here have, firstly, a *subsequent*, “past-tense narrative” (217) with no indication of when this subsequent narrating exactly takes place. The second factor distinguishes differences in distance: “We will define this difference in level by saying that *any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed.*” (228) Karpyshyn's and Dietz's novels are extradiegetic since the narrating condition happens at the first level of narrative presentation. Thirdly, instead of only describing the persons of narrating with *first-person* and *third-person* grammatical use, Genette differentiates the relationship between a narrator and their story depending on whether they are a character in the story or not. (244-245) The *Mass Effect* novels all contain an absent narrator, called a “*heterodiegetic*” narrator (in comparison to the “*homodiegetic*”, a present narrator), none of the narrators take part of their story from the position of a character. This relationship is unconditional, according to Genette: “Absence is absolute, but presence has degrees.” (245) The narrating instance of these four novels all follow

¹⁰⁵ Genette, p. 27, [original emphasis]. From here to page 41, references to this work is done with page number in text.

the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic model; that is a *subsequent* narrative account, with an *extradiegetic* relation in the first diegetic level, which embody an absent relationship – *heterodiegetic* – between narrator and story.

An enormous space station located deep in the Terminus Systems, Omega was unlike any other facility in the known galaxy. Built from the remains of a massive, irregularly shaped asteroid, the heavy-metal-rich core had been mined until the asteroid was almost completely hollow, providing the initial resources used to construct the facilities that completely covered every exposed inch of its surface. Its exact age was unknown, although everyone agreed the station had originally been built by the Protheans before they disappeared. However, nobody agreed on which had been the first species to resettle it once the Protheans were mysteriously wiped out.¹⁰⁶

Karpyshyn considers his book (in his quote about *Revelation*) to be a separate story that further increases the experience of the transmedia narrative which also builds on the storyworld of *Mass Effect*. How is the experience of addition implemented in the *Mass Effect* novels, in narrative terms? The above quote describes the space station Omega, a location frequently visited in *ME2*. It also demonstrates the extra- and heterodiegetic narrator of *Ascension*, who builds the set of this storyworld with descriptions like the one of Omega. The position of the narrator, which is discerned in this quote, constitute an objective relation to the storyworld which they tell. Furthermore, the attitude distinguished here is expressive for Karpyshyn's other narrators as well as the one in *Ascension*. Dietz' narrator, however, demonstrates a slightly more biased attitude to the storyworld and the events which is recounted.¹⁰⁷

Information on the storyworld is more often presented through the consciousness of a character. *Revelation* does this more than the other novels, where the extra- and heterodiegetic narrating instance gives room for the perspective of a character to form the amount of information and how it is presented.

The ghostly illumination of the familiar red-shifted universe spilled in though the cabin's tiny viewport, gradually cooling to the more normal hues as they decelerated. Grissom hated the viewports; Alliance ships were purely instrument driven – they required no visual references of any kind. But all

¹⁰⁶ Karpyshyn, 2008, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ See Dietz, 2012, comments on the Council (p. 8), and “disturbing holo” (p. 322).

vessels were designed with several tiny ports and at least one main viewing window, typically on the bridge, as a concession to antiquated romantic ideals of space travel.¹⁰⁸

This is part of the prologue to *Revelation*, and possibly the introduction to the entire series of novels under scrutiny here. It provides a profound introduction to the history behind the transmedia franchise that is *Mass Effect*, which has, unsurprisingly, a focus on humanity's place in the galaxy.¹⁰⁹ This history in the prologue is told by the heterodiegetic narrator, through the character Grissom's perceiving consciousness. "It was in 2148, a mere nine years ago, that the mining team on Mars had unearthed the remains of a long-abandoned alien research station deep beneath the planet's surface."¹¹⁰ What follows is an account of the history of humanity (in this storyworld, that is) and the cultural and societal implications of the discovery of the Prothean ruins on Mars. The reflections here, as elsewhere in the novel, do not clearly belong to the narrator's omniscient opinions, nor are they immediately announced as Grissom's comments by the narrator. Some paragraphs later, however: "The intercom crackled again, *interrupting Grissom's thoughts* and drawing his focus away from the offending viewport and back to the shipboard speaker in the ceiling."¹¹¹ And, this is repeated after another two pages: "Grissom's mind *was still distracted with thoughts* of how much everything had changed with the discovery of the alien bunker on Mars... a line of thinking that was not surprising given the unsettling reports from Shanxi."¹¹² The story of *Revelation* takes place eight years after this event, but this moment in humanity's history is vital for the rest of the transmedia narrative. The narrator uses Grissom here as the focal point, as in several other places in *Revelation* where information is recounted through the reflections, memories or feelings of a character, and not directly by the narrator's own sentiments. Genette names this relationship between the narrator and the character *focalization*, and for most part, the *Mass Effect* novels all generally fall in line with the focalization he calls *variable internal focalization*. (189) In this form of focalization, information is restricted to a character's conscious experiences, albeit changing characters, which can be both main characters, important for the plot, or minor side characters, or just some random. The

¹⁰⁸ Karpyshyn, 2007, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ At least until the next series, *Mass Effect: Andromeda*, which takes place in a different galaxy.

¹¹⁰ Karpyshyn, 2007, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Karpyshyn, 2007, p. 3, [my emphasis].

¹¹² Ibid., p. 5, [my emphasis].

terminology of focalization is not, however, applicable absolutely to an entire narrative, as Genette emphasize:

As this last example certainly shows, the commitment as to focalization is not necessarily steady over the whole length of a narrative /.../ Any single formula of focalization does not, therefore, always bear on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section, which can be very short. (191)

Early in *Revelation*, the narrative follows Anderson to the Citadel, the hub of galactic civilization. The descriptions of the enormous space station and its different districts consist both of variable internal focalization and of nonfocalization, where the narrator “says more than any of the characters knows”. (189) When describing the Presidium, there is no direct indication that these are direct thoughts of the character: “The Presidium had been designed to evoke a vast parkland ecosystem. /.../ The illusion was so perfect that most people, including Anderson, couldn’t distinguish it from the real thing.”¹¹³ From the moment Anderson steps onto the Presidium, however, he becomes the tour guide of the district rather than the narrator, he and his opinions becomes the point of focalization of the story:

Far in the distance he could see the Citadel Tower, where the Council met with ambassadors petitioning them on matters of interstellar policy and law. The Tower’s spire rose in *majestic solitude* above the rest of the buildings, barely visible at the point where the curve of the central ring created a false horizon.¹¹⁴

Genette suggest to “speak of variable focalization, of omniscience with partial restrictions of field” (194) in examples like the narrative discourse in *Revelation* which shifts between the perspectives of different characters and that of the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator. Thus, in examples where changes in focalization is confined in narratives, Genette propose the term “*alterations*”, which “consist either of giving less information than is necessary in principle, or of giving more than is authorized in principle in the code of focalization governing the whole.” Genette’s two terms for these examples are “*paralipsis*” for the former and “*paralepsis*” for the latter. (195, [original emphasis]) With the *Mass Effect* novels containing a mostly variable

¹¹³ Karpysyn, 2007, p. 111.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 112, [my emphasis].

internal focalization, breaches to this would be called *paralepsis* since the omniscient narrator presents more information than what any given character knows. Although, the line between knowledge shared by both narrator and character is often blurry.

There was a split second of lag as the signal was encrypted and packaged in a top-priority burst, then transmitted to a comm buoy orbiting Camala, and subsequently relayed across the extranet to the ambassador's terminal on the Citadel before finally being decoded. The delay was barely noticeable, but it did cause a slight hitch in the ambassador's image on his [Anderson's] monitor.¹¹⁵

It is quite probable that Anderson does know what causes the "slight hitch"; the process of communication in space is shortly before the above quote described as "incredibly complex and expensive". There is, nevertheless, no indication verb of any reflection on Anderson's part on space-communication in the narration, making it an addition in information given by the narrator. However, this sequence (p. 280-282) is told with Anderson's internal focalization, effectively making this quote a *paralepsis*. The quote provides insight into the everyday concerns in the *Mass Effect* storyworld for a space marine like Anderson, concerns he might not ponder on but that is still important to the understanding of his situation. Whether he possess this information or not, the narrator does and relays the information to the recipient.

Narrative Perspective According to Chatman

The continuous shifts in perspective from a character's consciousness to the extra- and heterodiegetic narrator makes the term focalization somewhat ineffective here, especially when discussing alterations in focalization. Seymour Chatman defined two terms to separate the *point-of-view* of character and narrator in *Coming to Terms* (1990) with the argument that Genette's term focalization does not attempt to differentiate between these two narrative instances. "I propose *slant* to name the narrator's attitudes and other mental nuances appropriate to the report function of discourse, and *filter* to name the much wider range of mental activity experienced by characters in the story world – perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, memories, fantasies, and the like."¹¹⁶ Thus, in the above example where Anderson visits the Presidium and "guides"

¹¹⁵ Karpysyn, 2007, p. 280.

¹¹⁶ Chatman, p. 143.

the reader, he is the one witnessing the Citadel Tower, filtering the experience, and commenting on its “majestic solitude”.¹¹⁷ Anderson is far from the only character possessing what Chatman define as “the mediating function of a character’s consciousness, perception, cognition, emotion, reverie – as events are experienced from a space within the story world.”¹¹⁸ In all four novels, the filter changes between chapters, sections, and sometimes paragraphs.

A further argument Chatman asserts for the term filter is that it, more than Genette’s focalization, “catches the nuance of the *choice* made by the implied author about which among the character’s imaginable experiences would best enhance the narration – which areas of the story world the implied author wants to illuminate and which to keep obscure.”¹¹⁹ The choice made sometimes comes down to some short phrases.

Yet despite the apocalyptic threat they posed, most people knew nothing of the Reapers. The Council had sealed all official records of the Reaper attack on the Citadel space station, covering up the evidence and denying the truth to prevent widespread panic across the galaxy. And, of course, the Alliance, *lapdogs of their new alien masters*, had followed along without protest.¹²⁰

The filter above belongs to the Illusive Man, a shadowy character at best, who plays a large part in the events of *ME2* and *ME3*. It demonstrates not only the events of the larger storyline of *Mass Effect* – the threat of (and eventual war with) the Reapers – but also the character’s opinions and feelings towards the official galactic dodging response to, what was a devastating attack on the heart of galactic politics. Blame was placed elsewhere and things returned to ‘normal’, but the Illusive Man knows more than most and after the ending of *ME1*, he takes matters into his own hands to ensure the future of humanity. The implied author’s choice of enhancing the Illusive Man’s opinion on the Alliance and their relation to the Council, both cowards in his view, motivates many of his decisions in *Retribution*, some of which has horrible consequences.

The debate on “the implied author” has yet to enter this analysis, a brief reference to its origin and Chatman’s use of the term is, nevertheless, in order. Chatman bases his theory on the

¹¹⁷ Karpyshyn, 2007, p. 112.

¹¹⁸ Chatman, 144.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., [original emphasis].

¹²⁰ Karpyshyn, 2010, p. 3-4, [my emphasis].

definition made by Wayne Booth: “This implied author is always distinct from the ‘real man’ – whatever we may take him to be – who creates a superior version of himself, a second ‘self’ as he creates his work /.../”¹²¹ Thus, when referring to the choices behind what a filter should enhance (in the case of this thesis), the person making those choices is not the author of the novel, but a separate and imagined version of this person. However, instead of referring to this “second-self-author”, for the purpose of this thesis, I borrow from Chatman’s explanation on the subject: “The implied author is the *agency* within the narrative fiction itself which guides any reading of it. Every fiction contains such an agency.”¹²² Filter, is thus used to refer to the agency of choice in the construction of a narrative by the represented story, filtered by choice with a certain motivation. This agency does not belong to the author, Karpysyn or Dietz, but to an instance between the author and the narrator. In this line of reasoning the next section turns its attention towards how the transferred storyworld of *Mass Effect* is presented through the narrating instance of various filters, and sometimes the narrator’s slant.

2.2.3. Narrative perspective in relation to the transferred features of *Mass Effect*

Revelation: The experience of addition via transferring the character Saren and representing his perspective

Since *Revelation* is a prequel it deals with many of the things that start the events of the *Mass Effect Trilogy*. One important character, apart from Anderson, that is featured in the novel as well as in *ME1*, is the Council Spectre Saren Arterius. In *ME1* he plays the role of the villain, the main quest in the game is to hunt him and his associates down. He is, in a sense, an important piece of content, an entity which is transferred between the media.

In the *Mass Effect* universe, a Spectre is an agent for the Council, the interstellar equivalence of government. Saren is in the beginning of *Revelation* on an investigation to track down stolen turian military-grade weaponry. The first description of the scene is presented with the narrator’s slant, it presents a neutral account of Saren’s investigation up to this point in the story: “Saren Arterius, a turian Spectre, waited patiently for the sun to disappear. For several hours Saren had been perched atop a rock outcropping, staking out a small, isolated warehouse in the desert on

¹²¹ Booth, Wayne, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 151.

¹²² Chatman, p. 74, [my emphasis].

the outskirts of Phend, Juxhi's capital city."¹²³ However, the point of view is quickly settled in alignment with Saren, and hence, his filter gives comments to the description of the infiltration situation: "The Skulls were small, a few dozen criminal mercenaries who had never been worth Saren's attention before tonight. *Then they'd made the mistake of thinking* they could purchase a stolen shipment of military-grade weapons that had disappeared from a turian transport freighter." (124-125, [my emphasis]) This is where the term focalization could of course be argued for, saying that these oscillations in point of view are due to alterations, in Genette's use of the term. However, that would be counterproductive since the point of view shifts slightly here and there, making the amount of alterations into the norm, rather than occasional alterations, in this sequence.

"Normally Saren would've turned the matter over to the local authorities and moved on to something bigger. But turians selling weapons to humans was something he took personally." (126, [my emphasis]) The emphasis here is to illuminate the "report function"¹²⁴ of the narrator's slant. What is vital here is not whether the narrator knows or tells more than the character, Saren is presumably aware of his normal patterns of working. What is vital here is whether the discourse, the narrating instance in Genette's wording, comes from the reporting function of the narrator (who, in Genette's theory, is located at another diegetic level than the events narrated, here *extradiegetic*), or from a character's consciousness.

Although relatively young at the time,¹²⁵ Saren's filter provides him with the impression of an experienced professional. "Saren shook his head in disbelief as he snapped his night-vision goggles into place. What possible use was there in leaving the two men to stand guard outside a warehouse in the middle of nowhere? They had no cover; they were completely exposed." (126) Comments like these are often implicitly made to be understood as part of the character's filter, and not the narrator's slant. He shoots the guards with his sniper rifle, the narrator inserting the name of the manufacturer, "Izaali Combine-manufactured", indifferently in the context of using the weapon on the guards. Weaponry and technology is often named with the manufacturer and sometimes model in *Revelation*, many of these names and models will be recognized by a

¹²³ Karpysyn, 2007, p. 124. From here to page 48, references to this work is done with page number in text.

¹²⁴ Chatman, p. 143.

¹²⁵ Revelation takes place some twenty years before *ME1*. See: Mass Effect Wiki, "Saren Arterius", http://masseffect.wikia.com/wiki/Saren_Arterius [Retrieved 2018-05-18]. Born in 2139, he is 26 years at the time of this novel.

recipient who has played the game(s) before reading the novel. This recognition could, of course, function the other way around; the recipient who first experience the novel might remember these names when playing the game(s).

Inside the warehouse, Saren checks the bodies for life signs. Finding a turian alive but injured amongst the bodies, a dialogue starts as the dying man asks his killer for help:

Saren dropped down on one knee and leaned in close to the other turian's flame-ravaged features. "You steal weapons from your own people, and then you sell them to *humans*?" he demanded in a fierce whisper. "Do you know how many turians I saw die by human hands?"

It took a tremendous effort, but somehow the burned man managed to mutter four faint words in feeble protest through his scorched lips. "That... war... is... over."

Saren stood up and pulled his pistol in one smooth motion. "Tell that to our dead brothers." (128-129, [original emphasis])

The war referred to in the above dialogue is known as the First Contact War.¹²⁶ It erupted in humanity's early settling in the galaxy, culminating in the turian occupation of Shanxi, to which humanity responded with force. Peace was eventually brokered between the species by the Council government to prevent a larger interplanetary war. It is later revealed that Saren did actually lose his brother in the war,¹²⁷ this is information not given in the game but contributes substantial meaning behind his obvious grudge against humans (as it is demonstrated in *ME1*) particularly among all the species.¹²⁸

Later on, Saren's investigation leads him to Groto, a batarian mercenary who is part of the group the Blue Suns. Saren interrogates the mercenary to find out what he knows about the attack on Sidon. The interrogation sequence starts with Groto's filter, but moves to being reported by the non-commenting narrator's slant, before settling in Saren's filter. After Saren has physically tortured his subject, the former eventually concludes that Groto was truthful: "Saren didn't get anything more out of him. He'd suspected as much, but he had needed to be absolutely sure. *There was too much at stake.*" (149-150, [my emphasis]) If this latter comment belonged to the narrator's slant, it would have been consistent with the narrating instance to add what was at

¹²⁶ As the scene continues, the war is mentioned by name, see Karpyshyn, 2007, p. 130.

¹²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 275.

¹²⁸ As far as I have been able to research; however, since the *Mass Effect Trilogy* contain approximately 100 hours of gameing, there is a possibility that I have overlooked something.

stake, or for whom. If concluding, however, that the comment belongs to Saren's filter it would prove more consistent with the reasoning that follows:

Someone had hired the Blue Suns. Someone with enough wealth and power to secure their exclusive loyalty. Someone who had taken extra precautions to make sure the Spectres wouldn't find out what was going on. Saren needed to know who had ordered the attack on Sidon and why. Billions of lives could be at stake, and he was more than willing to torture a single merc for hours on end of if there was even the smallest chance he could learn something that might help him break the case. (150)

Repeating "someone" in this manner, gives the impression that the reasoning above is Saren's line of investigative thought. Why would the narrator deliberate on the responsible person for the attack on Sidon in this way? If billions of lives are at stake, Saren reasons that the torture of one mercenary is justified. This fits every account of Saren's "professionalism" in *ME1*. Another comment comes in the end of the chapter:

First though, he had to clean up this mess. Arresting Groto wasn't an option; it would draw attention and alert whoever had hired the Blue Suns that a Spectre was on the case. It was easier – and safer – to just dispose of the body.

Saren gently placed a hand on either side of the batarian's head, then gave a savage twist at an awkward angle, breaking his elongated neck. A quick and painless death.

After all, he wasn't a monster. (150-151, [my emphasis])

The last comment could belong to either the narrator's slant or Saren's own filter. But they provide different interpretations. If a filter "catches the nuance of the *choice*",¹²⁹ like Chatman proposes, by filtering the information in a storyworld that could be represented, why choose Saren's supposed reflection on himself as *not a monster*? The oxymoron in the comment enhances the brutality in the physical torture that Saren recently put Groto through, in the purpose of getting information for his investigation, which provides further insight into Saren and the type of Spectre he is. Another section, the beginning of chapter 15, continues deepening the understanding of Saren's character and methods, and putting some (more?) doubt into his non-monstrous character. In this scene, he questions a lethally injured batarian woman, Jella, the

¹²⁹ Chatman, p. 144, [original emphasis].

only surviving victim of the attack on Dah'tan.¹³⁰ Eventually, Saren gets the name he was after by the witness and the recipient gets to follow his thoughts as he tries to deduce what could have been the motive behind both the attack on Sidon and Dah'tan. He is, briefly, interrupted by Jella who starts to cough blood and shake in a seizure from her injuries, which is reported by the narrator's slant before Saren's filter continues: "There was more to the raid on Sidon than batarian nationalism or antihuman terrorism, *he realised.*" (218, [my emphasis]) Ignoring the dying woman on the bed, his focus stays with the investigation, which is also represented in direct thoughts:

No, Saren corrected himself, ignoring the frantic beeping of the machines and the violent spasms still rocking Jella's body. Edan wouldn't have risked trying to clear port security. Not if there was even the slimmest chance someone already knew about his involvement. Which meant he was probably still hiding somewhere on Camala. (218-219, [original emphasis])

Even if there are direct thoughts¹³¹ in italics, the other reasoning is also a part of his filter, his "mental activity"¹³² which actively pushes away the dramatic sounds and movements around him. The phrasing in the sequence, further enhances Saren's filter, his viewpoint: "Saren idly twirled the hypodermic that might save her between his fingers, still considering the problem of Edan as he waited for her to expire." (219) Since the narrator has been mostly implicit in their comments so far, the only one waiting for someone to *expire* is Saren. Thus, it is his attitude towards Jella's life depicted here, that continues to add more depth to Saren's character. This section gives more reason for the recipient to question Saren's monstrous character, which he is certain (or trying to convince himself) that he does not possess.

In *MEI*, there are not many close encounters with Saren, (in relation to the number of hours the gamer could potentially put into the game). Only on a couple of occasions, is the recipient able to talk (or even try to reason) with him. Hence, much of the information on Saren is presented to the gamer through the accounts of other characters. Using Saren's filter as an approach to the depicted events in *Revelation* provides clues and pieces of information on his

¹³⁰ An incident after the one on Sidon. See: Karpysyn, 2007, p. 197-206.

¹³¹ Another perspective on direct thoughts like these, is the phenomenon of "free indirect discourse". For an analysis on the theoretical discussion of this term, see e.g. McHale, Brian, "Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts", *A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, Vol. 3 (1978), p. 249-287.

¹³² Chatman, p. 143.

character in a defining point of his life. Whether the recipient reads *Revelation* or plays *ME1* first, will probably affect the experience, but nevertheless, reading the novel in general will implement an expanded knowledge about Saren, and how he went from being an agent of the Council to one of the Reapers. The effect of expanding the experience of the storyworld is implemented, in this case, through the agency of choice which effectively filters the mentality of Saren.

Ascension: The experience of addition via selecting certain element of quarians that is represented from varied perspectives

The story of the second novel, *Ascension*, takes place two months after the events of *ME1*. Some spoilers are therefore included in the novel. In the aftermath of Saren, the geth and Sovereign's attack on the Citadel, the reader gets a closer look at the human organisation, Cerberus, which proves to play a large part of the story in both *ME2* and *ME3*, as well as the three last novels. The Cerberus leader, the Illusive Man, decides to "push forward with their asset inside the Ascension Project", after the attack on the Citadel.¹³³ This asset is Gillian, a twelve-year-old biotic, and she is the focus of this story.¹³⁴ However, the reader does not get to share her point of view until the ending of the novel. Instead, the novel is told by the narrator through different characters that are involved in Gillian's story. Commonly the filter of the events of the story is Kahlee Sanders. Kahlee is featured in all four novels, and is also featured in the mission "Grissom Academy: Emergency Evacuation" in *ME3*.

Point of view on quarians

Like the previous novel, the narrating instance in *Ascension* fluctuates between, what Genette calls, mostly variable internal focalization in which the voiced information given is restricted to the knowledge of a couple of different characters, and nonfocalization where the narrator presents more information than any of the characters knows.¹³⁵ Using Chatman's terms *slant* and *filter* instead, will be more coherent when examining the point of view from which information,

¹³³ Karpysyn, 2008, p. 8. From here to page 53, references to this work is done with page number in text.

¹³⁴ "Biotics is the ability of rare individuals to manipulate dark energy and create mass effect fields through the use of electrical impulses from the brain." *Mass Effect*, 2007, Codex, entry: "Technology"; "Biotics".

¹³⁵ See Genette, p. 189.

thoughts and comments are originating – in specific (sometimes very short) sequences – and how the perspective demonstrates a relationship to the transferred information.

As this thesis earlier examined how the different modalities of novels and digital games affect the transfer of the turian species, there is a similar modal outcome when transferring the idea of quarians.¹³⁶ Information through different filters, and occasionally the narrator's slant, provides different perspectives on the transferred media characteristics, the quarian species.

The quarians have an extraordinary placing in galactic civilization, which is presented early on in both *Ascension* and in the games. During the gamer's travels among the stars as Shepard, quarians are a rare sight in comparison to turians, and there is good reason for this. "Driven from their home system by the geth nearly three centuries ago, most quarians now live aboard the Migrant Fleet, a flotilla of fifty thousand vessels ranging in size from passenger shuttles to mobile space stations."¹³⁷ Most quarians keep to themselves and do not interfere in galactic politics or bind relations with other species.

Initially, Pel (a Cerberus operative) is not aware that the contact he is supposed to meet on Omega is in fact a quarian. At first, the contact does not show up to the meeting, but when Pel realizes he is being followed by an unknown figure a chase scene erupts through Omega. Pel eventually catches his follower, wrestles him down and then recognizes, "[w]ith a grunt of disgust", that his follower is not only a quarian, but also the Cerberus contact. (50) Pel does not like aliens in general, but his filter still makes it clear that quarians stand out in the galactic community. They are frowned upon by other species, a result of their unparalleled history and living conditions. The nomadic lifestyle of quarians has amongst other things branded them with a bad reputation in the galaxy, in the *Mass Effect Trilogy* they are often referred to as thieves and beggars.¹³⁸ These tales about quarians is amplified by Pel's filter in *Ascension*, he is not, however, fooled by these rumors:

¹³⁶ See p. 27-28 in thesis.

¹³⁷ *Mass Effect*, BioWare, 2007, "Aliens: Non-Council Races"; "Quarians".

¹³⁸ Ibid.: "Other species tend to look down on the quarians for creating the geth and for the negative impact their fleet has when it enters a system. This has led to many myths and rumors about the quarians, including the belief that underneath their clothes and breathing masks, they are actually cybernetic creatures: a combination of organic and synthetic parts."

Pel nodded. Since being driven from their homeworld by the geth, virtually all quarians now lived on the Migrant Fleet, a flotilla of several thousand ships wandering aimlessly through space. Generations of living in such an isolated, carefully controlled environment had rendered the quarian immune system all but useless against the viruses and bacteria swarming over every inhabited planet in the galaxy. To avoid exposure, they wore form-fitting enviro-suits beneath their ragged clothes and never removed their airtight visored helmets in public.

This had led to rumors that the quarians were in fact cybernetic; a mix of organic and machine beneath their clothes and visors. Pel knew the truth was much less sinister – a quarian couldn't survive outside the flotilla without a hermetically sealed suit and mask. (53-54)

His filter therefore, gives both a description of the reputation of the aliens, and the truth behind the masks. It further enhances the representation of the quarians, rumors might say that they are cybernetic, but in the reality of the storyworld their immune system is much weaker than any other species, leaving them vulnerable with low chances of surviving a crisis without help. Pel knows this, giving Cerberus an advantage against the quarians in coming confrontations. Choosing this representation – the weak and isolated aliens – demonstrates not just Pel's opinions, but furthermore, the xenophobic agenda of Cerberus. Thus, the filter effectively chooses, in Chatman's definition, how the transferred content can be represented. The representation of quarians is in this sequence filtered through Pel's knowledge and negative opinions on them. He is one of many (and not just Cerberus agents) who are convinced they are more untrustworthy than most other species. The fact that Golo is an exile of his people, does not make him look better in the eyes of Pel: "*What kind of sick, twisted deviant do you have to be to get exiled by an entire race of beggars and thieves?*" he asked himself, wondering if Golo was a murderer, rapist, or just a complete sociopath." (56, [original emphasis]) Pel's thoughts in italics offers not just a description of general opinions on quarians but also a directly subjective account from a xenophobic person's consciousness.

Subjective representation of quarians

The thoughts and the subjective account of the quarians can be further explained with Thon's theory of *subjective representation*. He argues against most of the previously defined terms for perspective in narratology – be it perspective, point of view, or focalization – in favour of an uncharged term, which he deems more accurate because of its neutrality. Thon propose to use the

term: “*the subjective representation of a character’s consciousness or mind*”. He continues: “It is precisely this kind of ‘direct access’ to a represented character’s consciousness or mind that what I propose to call subjective representation provides.”¹³⁹ Pel’s italicized thoughts embodies the *direct access* to his consciousness, which Thon argues for being implemented by a subjective representation. In this approach, it is possible to understand Pel’s filter as not only his, and therefore separate from the narrator’s own attitudes. That is, the presentation of a narrative from ‘inside’ the storyworld, in Chatman’s account. Thon’s approach, however, further extends the understanding that the implication of the filtered representation is the enabled subjectivity when presenting a narrative from within the character’s mind. Thon delineates three types of narrative representation which:

first, represent storyworld elements as they are (subjectively) represented in the consciousness of a particular character and, second, represent storyworld elements as they are (intersubjectively) perceived or experienced by a large group of characters, but also, third represent storyworld elements that are not perceived or experienced by any character in the storyworld at all.¹⁴⁰

Thus, Pel’s direct thoughts and other opinions and feelings (his filter) affect the narrative representation in correspondence with Thon’s first type. The opposite would, of course, be the third type of representation, one where the depiction is not dependent on any character-centred experience (cf. Genette’s nonfocalization), an objective representation.¹⁴¹ The first and third type of narrative representation are both used in the portrayal of quarians in *Ascension*:

It wasn’t uncommon for things to break down on the *Cyniad*. Like all ships, vessels, and vehicles associated with the Migrant Fleet, their rover had seen better days. Most species would have decommissioned it long ago, or relegated it to scrap heap. The quarians, short on materials and resources, had no such luxury.

Hilo wondered how much longer their makeshift repairs could keep the rover running before they’d finally have to admit defeat and strip it down for parts. Hopefully a few more months at least. Maybe another year if they were lucky.

¹³⁹ Thon, p. 238, [original emphasis].

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Lucky's not a concept usually associated with us quarians, he thought as the rover rolled to a stop beneath the loading doors. (101, [original emphasis])

The above quote demonstrates, in the first paragraph, the quarians' situation with the slant of the narrator, that which Thon calls objective representation. Resources are tight, leaving them with no option but using vehicles and technology way past its expiration date. This is a transferred media characteristic of the storyworld that is not experienced by anyone in the first paragraph, it is stated as a fact. Simultaneously, it conveniently provides vital context for several events in *Ascension*. In the second paragraph, the narrator's slant shifts to Hilo's filter, and his subjective representation of this storyworld element, the quarians' situation from a quarian perspective. The sequence is ended with a direct access to Hilo's consciousness and his thoughts. Interestingly, the non-existent luck of quarians is first represented as whether or not "they" are lucky, giving the impression of a representation of quarians from outside. Nevertheless, Hilo's thoughts then respond to the idea of luck with "us", as in "we quarians are never lucky", establishing that the second paragraph is also presented from Hilo's consciousness, regardless of the use of third person pronoun. The subjective representation of a consciousness does not have to be one-sided, on the contrary, Hilo's ambiguity enables a pluralistic perspective on this storyworld element. It presents the dynamics of a consciousness, who has hopes for the future, only remind himself that he and his fellow quarians are not the lucky ones.

Not only are quarians considered unlucky, but Hilo's and his crew has in this event fallen into a trap set by Golo. The rover is not coming back with his crewmates, but imposters that seek to imprison Hilo and question him for information. This time, the subjective representation combined with italics provides explanation of terminology from the *Mass Effect* universe:

The pistol slammed his head again, and his teeth bit down on his tongue. He tasted blood in his mouth, but he did not lose consciousness.

"I am Golo'Mekk vas Usela. I will ask you one last time. Who are you?"

Golo, crew of the Usela.

"You have no right to that name!" Hilo shouted, his words echoing inside his helmet. "You are vas Nedas! Golo nar Tasi!"

Crew of nowhere; Golo child of no one. Outcast. Alone. Reviled. (103, [original emphasis])

One way that *Mass Effect* creates a multifaceted presentation of aliens is in their names. Throughout the franchise, it becomes a compound media characteristic where the various alien species uses naming differently. Quarrians, living on a fleet, are closely connected to their respective ships, and are thus named according to the ship which they live and serve on.¹⁴² The information about quarian language and tradition is transferred here in the novel *Ascension*, a qualified medium which mainly relies on tactile text to communicate information. Thus, even in an action scene with dialogue (like the one last quoted), information such as the characteristics of tradition, can be provided through direct access into a subjective consciousness. The italicized thoughts function here partly to demonstrate the transferred information between novels and games. Using a subjective representation to demonstrate this information, gives profound meaning to the quarian traditions. This information could have been relayed with an objective account by the narrator's slant. Furthermore, given that it is obviously translated, what could be the reason for the quarian to translate his own language? The italics, however, reveal how the information is subjectively represented in the translation, regardless of who performs it.¹⁴³ Considering the convention of creating a visual distinction for directly represented thoughts through the usage of italics (as is mentioned in part one, p. 33), it is logical to assume that they belong to Hilo's consciousness.

Having a space flotilla for home has resulted in the quarrians being extremely dependent on each other, bonds of trust between family and crewmembers are cherished by quarrians. The judgement of exiling a quarian from the Migrant Fleet, affects the said quarian deeply considering that the individual is exiled from the entire quarian community and not just from one place. Thus, Hilo is angered when Golo introduces himself as part of this community, the same one he betrayed. Hilo's filter, and the direct access to his thoughts, enables the transfer of this information in just a couple of sentences.

The subjective representation of a character's consciousness is just that, subjective. However, there are different meanings to be found in the differing viewpoints of storyworld elements. Together they contribute to the storyworld by enhancing the complexity in elements such as quarian society, and how it is viewed upon by different characters. Frequently, subjective

¹⁴² See e.g.: *Mass Effect 2*, BioWare, 2010, Mission: "Tali: Treason".

¹⁴³ If this is an explicit comment from the narrator's slant, in italics, this would be the sole example in all three *Mass Effect* novels by Karpishyn.

representations of characters minds, their opinions and attitudes, function to provide the reader with a specific perspective on a certain aspect. Differing subjective representations through the filtering of consciousness are effectively used in *Ascension* to present intricate storyworld elements, such as the quarian sense of community, built by tradition and culture, and responses to their way of living.

Retribution: The experience of addition via transferring the indoctrination process from within the affected consciousness

The third novel by Karpyshyn, *Retribution*, takes place sometime after *ME2* and nearly three years after the events of *Ascension*.¹⁴⁴ At the end of the latter, the character called Grayson betrays his employer, Cerberus, and goes into hiding. Trying to make a life for himself on Omega as a mercenary for Aria T'Loak, Grayson is captured by Cerberus agent Kai Leng. Over the years working for Cerberus, Grayson gathered information on them, which he sends to Kahlee in the last minutes before captured. Kahlee and Anderson gives the information to the turians, hoping that they can succeed where the Alliance has failed for three decades, bring Cerberus and the Illusive Man down.

In Genette's classical terminology, *Retribution* generally exhibits a narrating instance that oscillates between a variable internal focalization and nonfocalization, like both prior examples.¹⁴⁵ For the examples given below, Chatman's and Thon's terms for perspective will be used instead. The analysis of different viewpoints on quarians provides some explanation to the complexity in transferring such storyworld elements. A similar focus is implemented in the discussion below, with terminology from Chatman and Thon, to investigate a storyworld phenomenon which involves the depths of consciousness.

In the *Mass Effect* universe, there is a phenomenon called "Indoctrination", that could be considered a compound media characteristic in the franchise. It is explained in multiple ways in the game trilogy, this is one account from a dialogue sequence with an asari scientist studying the "signal" emitted by Sovereign:

¹⁴⁴ Karpyshyn, 2010, p. 8. From here to page 61, references to this work is done with page number in text.

¹⁴⁵ See Genette, p. 189.

Sovereign's signal is too strong. Spend too much time near the ship and you feel it. Like a tingle at the back of the skull. It's like a whisper you can't quite hear. You're compelled to do things but you don't know why. You just obey. Eventually, you just stop thinking for yourself. It happens to everyone at the facility. My first test subject was the man I replaced. Now I just want to get out of here before it happens to me.

/.../

Signal's not exactly the right word. There's some kind of energy field emanating from the ship. It changes thought patterns. Over time--days, maybe a week--it weakens your will. You become easier to manipulate and control. But it's a degenerative condition. There's a balance between control and usefulness. The less freedom a subject maintains, the less capable it becomes.¹⁴⁶

There are other descriptions of indoctrination in *MEI*, other characters can give Shepard (and in extension the gamer) similar information. However, most often they are accounts given by someone, as with the asari scientist, after the experience or through second-hand information. In some cases, like with Saren, information on indoctrination can be observed through pictorial and auditory depiction of the indoctrinated individual. The other games also inform the gamer about this phenomenon, but it is prominent in *MEI* because of the main antagonists Saren and Sovereign, and their relation which is founded by the latter indoctrinating the former. This phenomenon, this motif of *Mass Effect*, is further referenced to in *Revelation*, but not in a manner which could grant the recipient deeper comprehension of the cognitive effects of indoctrination.¹⁴⁷

Correspondingly to the previous novels discussed, various viewpoints provide distinct representations of compound media characteristics that are transferred in *Retribution*. Indoctrination can be understood as such a characteristic, which is transferred as information between the games and the novels along the different depictions. The part below will analyse how indoctrination, a multi-layered characteristic phenomenon in *Mass Effect*, is depicted in *Retribution* through the direct experiences of an indoctrinated individual.

¹⁴⁶ *Mass Effect*, BioWare, 2007, Mission: "Virmire", dialogue with Rana Thanoptis.

¹⁴⁷ See Karpysyn, 2007, p. 321: "The notes on the flash drive showed a steady progression into dementia, a deteriorating mental state directly linked to incidents of exposure to *Sovereign*."

When Grayson is captured by Cerberus in the beginning of *Retribution*, they implant him with cybernetic technology which they recovered from the Collectors.¹⁴⁸ As Grayson lays on an operating table, the Illusive Man explains that the technology, “allows the Reapers to communicate with and eventually dominate the organic host, even from across the Galaxy.” (88) After implanting Grayson, Cerberus lock him in a cell to study him and the indoctrination process from a safe distance. The transformation is slow – which is explained both as consequence of the scientists’ methods, and because Grayson tries to mentally resist – but eventually he realises the impact of his implantations:

They were inside his head, speaking to him in whispers too faint to understand. These weren’t like the critical, sarcastic voice he used to hear in his thoughts. That voice was gone. The others had silenced it forever.

He tried to ignore them, but it was impossible to block out their constant, insidious murmur. There was something simultaneously repulsive yet seductive about them. Their presence in his mind was both a violation and an invitation: the Reapers calling to him across the great void of space. (113)

Unlike the differing representations of quarians which the various filters in *Ascension* enable, the subjective representation of the Reaper indoctrination is only made from the filter of Grayson’s mind. Any other account of indoctrination in the novel is depicted from an outside point of view from either the reporting slant of the narrator or another character perceiving Grayson’s transformation. However, suggesting that the filter constitutes a subjective representation of *one* character’s consciousness or mind could turn out misleading in this example. The above quote demonstrates Grayson’s subjective representation of feeling that there is another presence in his mind. Nevertheless, the subjective representation of Grayson’s consciousness is still part of his filter, even as the Reapers are trying to penetrate his mind. He can hear their voices in his head, and he is struggling to shut them out: “There was something simultaneously repulsive yet seductive about them. Their presence in his mind was both a violation and an invitation...” (113) Grayson’s experience of the Reapers initiating the indoctrination process filters through his reflection on the presence of something intruding in his mind, subjectively representing the will

¹⁴⁸ In *ME2* the main antagonists are the Collectors. The enigmatic species are: “human-sized insectoid bipeds and can resemble massive winged beetles.” See *Mass Effect 2*, 2010, Codex, entry: “Aliens: Non-Council Races”; “Collectors”. They are in *ME2* revealed to be servants of the Reapers.

of the Reapers attempting to indoctrinate him. Piece by piece, the Reaper takes over Grayson, his body, mind, and consciousness.

When Grayson woke up, he was horrified to discover he was a prisoner in his own body. He could see and hear everything around him, but it seemed surreal, almost as if he was watching a projection on a vid screen with the volume and brightness set way too high.

He rolled over in the cot, spun to put his feet on the floor, stood up, and began to pace restlessly about the cell – but none of these actions came from his own volition. His body refused to respond to his commands; he was powerless to control his own actions. He had become a meat puppet, an instrument of Reaper will.

He briefly registered the fact that his crippled knee had somehow repaired itself overnight. Then his eyes flickered downward, giving him a glimpse of his body, and his mind recoiled in disgust. (123-124)

The representation of Grayson's consciousness, still intact (but not for very long) yet prisoner in a body he is unable to control, establishes the subjectivity in depicting mental experiences of a character. Because the experience is presented using Grayson's filter, the resulting representation is him mediating his feelings and mental activity in the moment of experience. The effect is more intimate than any depiction made of outside observation, such as Rana Thanoptis in *ME1*.

Cerberus, having watched the progress of Grayson's transformation, and therefore also his cognitive resistance to the implants, drugs him with narcotics in hope that the lowered self-control during intoxication will speed up the process, which it does. The Reapers gain increasingly more control of him, to the point that his consciousness is disconnected from the rest of himself:

He could see and hear everything acutely, his senses relaying information along the network of synthetic synapses coursing through the gray matter of his brain. He could feel the temperature of the air, cool against his skin. The stench of his own flesh – unwashed in weeks – filled his nostrils.

/.../

But though he was fully aware of his surroundings, it was all somehow *distant*, as if it was filtered before being processed. This wasn't the pleasant fog of a red sand high, though he could feel that the effects from the last dose of drugs Cerberus had given him had yet to clear his system. This was

something else. It was almost as if his consciousness had been removed from the equation, the inexplicable link between the physical and mental self severed. (146-147, [my emphasis])

The above quote demonstrates the process of indoctrination through both Grayson's filter and the narrator's slant, in which Grayson's consciousness is losing control over his actions to the Reapers. Descriptions in the sequence following the above quote are precisely "distant" in the verbal presentation as he has lost the command of his body. He feels how the Reapers control his body and senses, and he perceives his surroundings in second hand experience: "Relegated to the role of observer, he was witness as the Reapers moved him over to the cell door until his ear was pressed up against it." (148) The close relation between Grayson's mediating filter and the represented indoctrination process enables subtle changes in mental activity. Grayson is not described to be doing, feeling or saying things, the Reapers are. In the different sequences in which Grayson's filter mediates the events, the Reapers increasing gain of power over Grayson is made more apparent with each sequence.

Several accounts of indoctrination depict how the process changes the person inflicted.¹⁴⁹ In the previous quotes, the subjective representation of Grayson, and his filter, illustrates this change from the point of view of the trapped consciousness. Thon argues, as has been mentioned earlier, that the subjective representation grants a "direct access"¹⁵⁰ to the given character's consciousness. After escaping Cerberus (in a series of events), Grayson finds himself in a brief control of himself. He takes the opportunity to reflect on the next step, not knowing the Reapers purpose or motivation, but wanting no part in it, he decides that, "[s]uicide was the quickest solution, of course." (199) The subjective representation then provides a direct access, but not to Grayson's mind:

Something is wrong.

The Reapers sensed the changes in the brain waves of their host through the synthetic network monitoring his mental activity. They recognized the pattern flashing through his synapses: hopelessness; self-destruction. They had lost a vessel once before like this. This time they were prepared.

¹⁴⁹ *Mass Effect*, BioWare, 2007, Mission: "Virmire", Rana: "You're compelled to do things but you don't know why. You just obey."

¹⁵⁰ Thon, p. 238.

/.../

The avatar cannot be allowed to harm itself.

The Reapers understood that Grayson had grown more resistant to their overt attempts to control him; his mind was adapting, developing new ways to protect itself from their domination. But there were other forms of control. (200, [original emphasis])

One implication of the Reaper indoctrination is that eventually, the victim's consciousness is taken over by the Reapers.¹⁵¹ Thus, the Reapers' hold over Grayson extends into his mind. The change in filter happens without an interaction from the narrator's slant, it instantly moves into the direct access into the Reaper consciousness and their subjective representation of how to best control their "host". In the earlier examples, Grayson still possesses the "mediating function",¹⁵² the filtering of his experiences, however disconnected his consciousness might be from control of his body. Here, another consciousness is subjectively represented, without Grayson's knowledge of this mental activity.

As in the previous novels, the italics represent the direct access to the mental activity in the consciousness. Grayson does not have access to the memory of hitherto loss of a "vessel", how could he? The Reaper filter thus presents the result of a choice of "which areas of the story world the implied author wants to illuminate", in Chatman's words.¹⁵³ In the final confrontation with Saren in *ME1*, Shepard can try to talk sense into him. If Shepard is experienced enough, and the gamer has played in a certain way, Saren will break free from the Reaper indoctrination and take his own life.¹⁵⁴ The agency of choice in this filter illustrates the relation between the novels and the games as they both belong to the same storyworld. By selecting this memory, despite the possibility of playthroughs where Saren does not die by his own hand, the agency presents a reference to the events in *ME1* and the power of the Reapers, represented in both examples of Saren and Grayson. The latter seems entirely oblivious of the Reapers in his mind as they prevent him from committing suicide: "He raised the trembling blade to his throat and closed his

¹⁵¹ *Mass Effect*, BioWare, 2007, Mission, "Virmire", Rana: "Eventually, you just stop thinking for yourself."

¹⁵² Chatman, p. 144.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ This depends partly on a skill called Charm or Intimidation (depending on the player's choice), and if the gamer can convince Saren on Virmire, making him doubt the Reapers' promises. See *Mass Effect*, BioWare, 2007, Mission: "Race Against Time: Final Battle": "I suppose I should thank you, Shepard. After Virmire, I couldn't stop thinking about what you said. About Sovereign manipulating me. About indoctrination. The doubts began to eat away with me. Sovereign sensed my hesitation. I was implanted to strengthen my resolve."

eyes. A bizarre mix of emotions flooded through him. He'd expected to feel fear, and there was plenty of that. But he also felt an odd sense of hope and elation." (201) From this moment, Grayson's and the Reapers' consciousness are juxtaposed in their representations. Sometimes Grayson demonstrates awareness of the Reapers actions (both physical and mental), other times, he does not:

He had to warn her to stay away from him, no matter what. He had to tell her not to look for him; not to try and help him.

He has feelings for her.

The Reapers made another slight alteration to Grayson's thought pattern. Instead of his rational, conscious mind doing what was right, he momentarily succumbed to his primal, subconscious yearnings and desires.

"Kahlee, this is Grayson. Listen closely – I need to see you. Right away. Send me a reply as soon as you get this."

Grayson ended the recording and sent the message off, completely unaware of what the Reapers had done. (202, [original emphasis])

Shifting the point of view between the narrator's slant (describing and commenting on the events), and the two filters of the Reapers and Grayson, magnifies the complexity of the storyworld element indoctrination. Juxtaposing the two consciousnesses illustrate the close relation between them, a further example of the implications of indoctrination. The events and characters in the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, demonstrate time and again the capacity of Reaper indoctrination, but never from a subjective representation from within the consciousness affected. In *Retribution*, the subjective representation of both parasite and host (the Reapers and Grayson), and thus the direct access to these consciousnesses establish both Grayson's willpower – how he initially fights against the Reapers – and the Reapers many techniques to control their organic victim – turning Grayson's body, emotions and thoughts against himself.

Deception: The negating experience of a represented storyworld

Kahlee and Anderson set out in the beginning of *Deception* to convince the Council that the Reapers are real and they are coming, following the end of Karpysyn's *Retribution*. They attempt this by showing them Grayson's body and the Reaper technology which Cerberus

implanted. The Council is reluctant to believe that this is evidence of anything else but Cerberus's horrible methods, they do however encourage Kahlee and Anderson to continue their investigation. Along with them is Nick, a biotic student on the Ascension Project to give his testimony of Grayson's attack on Grissom Academy. While on the Citadel, the trio meet Hendel and Gillian who have come back from the Quarian deep space mission. Both younglings (Nick and Gillian, though separately) disappear and Kahlee, Anderson and Hendel follow the trail to Omega, where there are many complications involving Kai Leng, mercenary bands and Aria T'Loak. The following analysis will be significantly less thorough than the previous ones, with reference to the controversy around the novel and to the following message:

The teams at Del Rey and BioWare would like to extend our sincerest apologies to the Mass Effect fans for any errors and oversights made in the recent novel *Mass Effect: Deception*. We are currently working on a number of changes that will appear in future editions of the novel.¹⁵⁵

There is yet no sign of a new edition of the novel.

The narrative in *Deception* is structured around the different characters in the story, quite similar to Karpyshyn's novels. It is a predominantly a variable focalized narrative, where the point of view is directed by different characters, although one at the time. Differing from Karpyshyn's novels, *Deception* further contains more sections where a nonfocalized narrative constitutes the source of information for the reader.

An important piece of the transferred media content in the storyworld of *Mass Effect*, is its characters. The main characters from the trilogy, Commander Shepard and his or her crew, is not featured more than a few references over the last three novels. A couple of other side characters are, however, involved in the stories of the novels. One such character is Kai Leng who, in the games, first appears in *ME3*. Among the novels, he is initially presented as the Cerberus assassin who hunts and captures Paul Grayson, in the beginning of *Retribution*. He, "had become one of the organization's top wet-work operatives. But he was more than just a ruthless killer. He

¹⁵⁵ See further on: Gamespot, "BioWare apologizes for Mass Effect novel errors" <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/bioware-apologizes-for-mass-effect-novel-errors/1100-6349818/> [Retrieved 2018-04-18] and: "Errors in Mass Effect: Deception" <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XBpMF3ONII308D9IGG8KICBHfWKU0sXh0ntuky-cmo/preview?pli=1> [Retrieved 2018-04-18]. The original message cannot be accessed anymore since BioWare has shut down the forum where it was released. But can be found quoted in both links above, in the moment of writing, 2018-04-18.

understood the need to be discreet; he knew how to plan and implement complex and delicate operations.”¹⁵⁶ This description is coherent with the depiction of Kai Leng in *ME3*, where he acts precisely as a ruthless, but discreet assassin. He is one of the main antagonists, and there are several confrontations between him and Shepard (and in extension, the gamer). Chronologically, the events in *ME3* take place after the ones in *Retribution* and *Deception*.

The characteristics of Kai Leng are described in *Deception* through both his filter of events, and through some comments originating from the narrator’s slant. In the following example, Leng sneaks into Anderson’s apartment on the Citadel to plant it with small surveillance bugs:

Leng paused to savor his surroundings. He knew Anderson and Kahlee the way a predator knows its prey. They were amateurs insofar as he was concerned, and the battle on the Grissom Academy space station was proof of that. Anderson could have killed him that day. *Should* have killed him.¹⁵⁷

His filter presents his attitude towards Anderson and Kahlee, which is marked by “insofar as he was concerned”. The filter presents Leng as feeling superior to others. Using the metaphor predator and prey further enhances that superiority. Additionally, Leng’s filter provides a thought pattern which refers to the end of *Retribution*, where Anderson shot Leng in the legs instead of killing him. In the same sequence, the narrator’s slant comments on Leng’s personality:

Working with the speed and certainty of the experienced operative that he was, Leng placed the pickups in locations that, when taken together, would provide complete coverage of everything that took place in the apartment. Then, having placed a wireless tap under the comm console, he was done. Or should have been done. But Leng was something of an adrenaline junkie and enjoyed being where he was.¹⁵⁸

This sort of commenting is very different from any comment from the narrators’ slants in Karpysyn’s novels, which is often provided implicitly by any narrator. And it is problematic in the context of transferring media content. Through explicitly stating that Leng is “an adrenaline junkie” there is not much room left for interpretation. When Saren, in *Revelation*, is

¹⁵⁶ Karpysyn, 2010, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Dietz, 2012, p. 63, [original emphasis].

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

described as “not a monster” there is plenty of irony in the context of having just tortured a subject for hours.¹⁵⁹ If understood with Chatman’s term filter, discerning the comment as belonging to Saren’s own viewpoint makes the irony belonging to the agency of choice behind the filter, the implied author. What the comment is specifically referring to is left to the reader. In the example of Leng the adrenaline junkie, however, this space of reader interpretation is removed by its direct approach and lack of irony (or parody for that matter). Explicitly commenting on the characteristics of Leng is in direct divergence with Karpyshyn’s hopes for *Revelation*, that the novel will not “negate their experience playing the game, but adds to the overall universe”, when this space is removed.¹⁶⁰

There are in *Deception* many references to the previous novels, which function to place this story in the context of the others. The references contain, however, many inconsistencies with Karpyshyn’s novels; events in *Deception* which refers to the previous novels are either misinformed or left out for no apparent reason. Many of them correspond to Thon’s definition of “logically impossible situations”.¹⁶¹ One of the larger contradictions resides in the novels logically impossible timeline in relation to the other novels, and to the game trilogy.¹⁶² If one desires to expand and grow a transmedia storyworld, it demands some consistencies, such as progression of events that are in relation to each other. Nevertheless, as Thon proposed, these inconsistencies in the representation can be ignored, even though “it is significantly more difficult to cue recipients into imagining logically impossible situations that it is to cue them into imagining impossible storyworlds.”¹⁶³ The explicit comment from the narrator’s slant of Kai Leng, the adrenaline junkie, could in this manner also be ignored, however, that is up to each recipient’s comprehension of the storyworld.

¹⁵⁹ See p. 45 in thesis.

¹⁶⁰ Karpyshyn, Drew, “Mass Effect: Revelation”, http://drewkarpyshyn.com/c/?page_id=7 [Retrieved 2018-03-13].

¹⁶¹ Thon, p. 61.

¹⁶² The list of inconsistencies would be too long to summarize here. See: “Errors in Mass Effect: Deception” https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XBpMF3ONII308D9IGG8KICBHfWKU0sXh0ntuky-_cmo/preview?pli=1 [Retrieved 2018-04-18].

¹⁶³ Thon, p. 61.

2.2.4. End discussion: The representation of a storyworld with different combinations of sign functions

The tactile text in the novels has the ability to convey not only information (the content of *Mass Effect*) but also a subjective representation of this information through direct access to a character's consciousness. This ability is enabled in the examples demonstrated in this second part of the analysis by the different narrative viewpoints, the filter that effectively chooses which among the conceivable mental processes of a character to represent the storyworld.¹⁶⁴

But if digital games are multimodal on all four aspects of modality, how come the *Mass Effect* novels can enhance the storyworld like it does with tactile text in a manner which the games do not? I suggest that the novels expand the storyworld, existing in the *Mass Effect* games, with these different subjective representations of storyworld content. In the context of video game adaptations, Hutcheon argues that, "videogames, like virtual reality experiments, cannot easily adapt what novels can portray so well: the "*res cogitans*," the space of the mind."¹⁶⁵ Thon establishes in his *Transmedial Narratology* how the subjective representation of a character's consciousness can be depicted in, so called visual, media dominated by resembling sign functions (contemporary feature films, graphic novels, and video games). The space of a consciousness is in the *Mass Effect* novels instead presented using tactile text, a medium dominated by conventional sign functions. The literary text allows for the consciousness to be described using the conventional sign functions of language. In Wolf's explanation of description as a process of transformation, he concludes that, "[w]ords can describe conceptual ideas that have no perceptual forms; unshowable things like inner states /.../ and impressionistic experiences which the author describes in terms of how they make someone *feel*, instead of just what is seen and heard."¹⁶⁶ I would argue that the *Mass Effect Trilogy* does attempt to demonstrate several abstract ideas and feelings, voice acting is used to emphasize feelings, and distorted images are used to relay complex concepts. Nevertheless, the examples of Karpyshyn's *Mass Effect* novels establish that description as a means of transformation, can further develop complex concepts.

¹⁶⁴ See Chatman, p. 144.

¹⁶⁵ Hutcheon, p. 14, [original emphasis].

¹⁶⁶ Wolf, p. 250, [original emphasis].

Saren's filter, for example, allows for an expansion of his character. Why did he ally himself with Sovereign, and therefore exposing himself to the risk of indoctrination? These are questions that the recipient of *ME1* might ask. *Revelation* does provide clues via describing his mental activity. Is he a monster or not? He is not a character of frantic lunacy; cold logic is applied to solve each case. Furthermore, the filtering through his viewpoint grants, on several occasions, his sentiments on the turian position in the galactic civilization. But when do a character's motives of justice drive them too far?

The various filters which subjectively represent the quarians, in Karpyshyn's second *Mass Effect* novel, demonstrates both xenophobic opinions on the nomadic species, as well as the unique quarian culture and traditions from the point of view from quarians. While the recipient of the franchise can learn a lot through reading the in-game Codex entries, and initiate dialogues with quarians, profoundly personal representation is not portrayed in the trilogy.

Thirdly, the representation of the process of indoctrination, is first and foremost a change in mentality. Filtering the narrative through both Grayson and the Reapers, grants for a representation of experiences that can only be guessed in the game trilogy. Is this a concept that cannot be depicted in digital games? Thon's analysis of subjective representation of character consciousness in contemporary video games, demonstrates this as a possibility.¹⁶⁷ Some interpretations of the *Mass Effect Trilogy* deem that the games attempt such a depiction.¹⁶⁸ However, in *Retribution*, the agency behind the choices in filtering a character's experiences can thus select to describe the parts of Grayson's mind which reinforce the depiction of his efforts to consciously fight the Reapers.

3. Conclusion

Investigating the *Mass Effect* novels in the above analysis and their relationship to the popular action role-playing games, the *Mass Effect Trilogy*, discerns firstly some differences and similarities in the media modalities. Most obviously, the digital games are multimodal on all four

¹⁶⁷ See Thon, p. 305-326.

¹⁶⁸ In fan discourse around *Mass Effect*, specifically *ME3*, there is a phenomenon called "Indoctrination Theory", in which it is claimed that Shepard is indoctrinated by the Reapers since the end of *ME2*. BioWare has never officially commented on the accuracy in this interpretation; however, according to the theory, Shepard's experiences would be subjective representations of indoctrination.

aspects of modality, affecting some transferred elements to a very different presentation in the novels.

The shared spatial and temporal dimension between the novels and the games embodies the storyworld, which I describe as a compound media characteristic, coinciding with Elleström's theory. The meanings and pieces of information that belong to the *Mass Effect* storyworld are thus transferred between the qualified media at hand. *Revelation* was published, and thus experienced by assumingly many recipients, before the arrival of *ME1*. Furthermore, Karpysyn is not only the author of the three first novels in this series, but also the lead writer to *ME1* and *ME2*. Any discussion of transferring information from an original to a version, one author to another, is therefore excluded on purpose, since it is his novels this thesis centres around. Instead, I stress Bruhn's description of the dialogue *between* media, where information is moved in different directions.

When transferring storyworld characteristics such as the alien species turians, the multimodality of digital games enables a very distinct representation compared to the one the novels present. The lack of auditory representation and a different concept of virtual space are two aspects of the tactile text which renders a different presentation of turians if compared to the games. Because the virtual space of the novels exists dominantly in the imagination of the recipient, it can never simulate the same representation as the one in the virtual space of the digital games. Nevertheless, there is – as I accentuate – a multimodality in the novels' use of language concerning the semiotic modality, which is distinguishable in the use of metaphors and references to sound effects. Blending conventional and resembling sign functions in this manner allows representations of storyworld contents to efficiently transfer between the media. Depicting aliens in both media can, therefore, evoke similar representations in the recipient's imaginative creation of virtual space.

The second part initially presents the narrative discourse as one of the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic model. This narrating instance is combined with characters' perspectives, which limit the information given according to a character, Genette's variable internal focalization. The perspectives on narrative information changes repetitively in the novels, thus, the analysis turns to Chatman's understanding of slant and filter. Comprehending the perspectives on transferred information as the result of an agency which effectively selects what to depict in the narrative, often demonstrates references to the storyworld features in the digital games. Characteristics

such as Saren's "monstrosity" can thus be delineated from a selection of his own mental reasoning. Quarian traditions and aspects of culture are depicted from various filters which, depending on the character filter, influence the representation. The subjective representation of a quarian's mind further intensifies the characteristics of Quarrians. The fragility of consciousness and the Reapers' power over organic minds are presented through the subjective representation of both sides in the indoctrination process. Lastly, explicit comments from the narrator's slant in *Deception*, insinuate certain interpretations of the characteristics of Kai Leng. Falling dangerously close to do the opposite of what Karpishyn hoped for with *Revelation*, negate recipients' experiences. Some strategies in narrative representation can thus in the novels reinforce or develop characteristics of content in the digital games. But it is a fine line to tread between adding to, and negating, a recipient's interpretation of a storyworld.

The relationship between the *Mass Effect Trilogy* and the novels published in the same franchise by Karpishyn and Dietz, is therefore partly built by the recipients themselves. However, there are many ways in which the novels, through their presentations, continue to build upon the storyworld, as is summarized here in the conclusion. I suggest that the most important one is the depiction of the storyworld filtered through different characters' mental activities, especially because representations of consciousness are scarce in the trilogy. It is an approach that is frequently applied when specific characteristics of the storyworld are transferred, which in Karpishyn's case – and Dietz' in much lesser degree – provide representations which can expand recipients' interpretations precisely because they are centred around characters' subjective viewpoints from within the storyworld.

Concluding from the study of the relation between the *Mass Effect* novels and games, it is apparent that the term "novelization" – with its connotation to both film and adaptation of story – is not an appropriate term to describe this literary genre. In Wolf's differentiation between adaptation and growth, however, the latter offers a constructive concept for the additions to the storyworld which the novels provide. Many sorts of games incorporate expansion packs, otherwise called add-ons, with the purpose to add new elements of either weaponry and gear, characters, game levels, or areas to discover. With these two concepts in mind, I suggest calling the novels under scrutiny in this thesis *media expansion*; because it is their main purpose and goal to expand the storyworld, as it exists both in the media products of the franchise and in the virtual space in the imagination of the recipient.

For further research, a broader study could demonstrate this phenomenon in other franchises, genres, and possibly other media combinations. In the case of *Mass Effect*, another study could position itself in the field of ludology (game studies), and discuss this phenomenon (and the dialogue between literature and games) from the main perspective of the games. It could further incorporate the large number of comics which are also published in context with the *Mass Effect Trilogy*.

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