A Reflection & Immersion of an Artificial Reality: 
An Understanding of Red Dead Redemption II

Stories of American outlaws, cowboys, the rise of the railroad, and the rocky road towards reconstruction have been told and retold in American culture. The American West has entertained audiences for decades, in books on a shelf and on screens big and small. However, as modern media continues to advance, so does its means of telling stories for audiences. Video games have been on a continuous rise in popularity, and with that notoriety comes expansion into other genres. The emergence of the Red Dead video game series was inevitable, for if books or film can tell the tales of America’s past, why can’t a video game? This leads to the 2018 action-adventure video game Red Dead Redemption 2, the latest of the Red Dead Series which has emerged not only as the most popular of the franchise but as one of the most popular and most critically acclaimed video games in the industry’s history. This particular media object is one of the most recent, and possibly one of the most important, representations of America’s Western ideology and history that has previously been done by numerous forms of media. However, this representation of said American identity and dramatic media shift from traditional to a modern video game allows for a greater sense of understanding and exposure to participants, because they actively participate. It is a game which was not only constructed with impressive visual graphics, improved combat mechanics, and a massive yet well detailed environment which has been noted to have given gamers the ability to explore a fully immersive experience into the Old American West. A means of interacting and participating in a world and narrative that not only functions independently from the player but allows the player to genuinely exist in the space. Aside from the visual aesthetics and the voicework of the game’s characters, the most quintessential component of the video game is how the players actually play the game and what
they feel when playing it. This idea, of how and why the player actually plays the game and what that says about the experience, is what demands to be understood. *Red Dead Redemption 2*’s significant degree of depth and thematic attention, combined with its innovative methods of gameplay and player immersion may help to explain why this title stands out amongst the numerous games that already exist. How does its use of characters, world building, opportunities for player choice, and the very setting it utilizes work as a conduit for the game’s to be communicated to the player?

**Describing Red Dead Redemption 2**

The video game industry has grown to become one of the most popular and the most lucrative industries in the world. The industry has managed to earn $179.7 billion as reported in this year’s record industry earnings call and is now a bigger moneymaker than the global movie and North American sports industries combined (Witkowski, 2020). The rapid growth of video game developers and their respective gaming communities has resulted in the industry becoming ever more visible in most if not all outlets of media. Everything from television commercials, product endorsements, televised gaming tournaments, and the rise of some gamers to celebrity status have risen to be very noticeable trends in popular media. However, with this massive boom in attention, it is still very difficult for one of the many thousands of games produced every year to not only become popular but to become industry shaping.

The game *Red Dead Redemption* has been considered one of those special few, who just so happened to hit all of the right notes to not only be critically successful but a financial triumph for its developers. **HOW MUCH SHOULD I TALK ABOUT THE ORIGINAL?** It would take nearly a decade for a sequel to be released, and while many were excited, no one could have
anticipated the kind of impact and cultural momentum it would bring. *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the 2018 action-adventure prequel to its predecessor that not only delivered on its promise of better visual graphics, improved combat mechanics, and a new setting, what was given to gamers and the world was essentially a fully immersive experience into the Old American West. It would be this means of interacting and participating in a world and narrative that not only functions independently from the player but allows the player to exist in the space that made it necessary to be the subject of communicative study. Rather than simply just follow directions and fight certain people to win in the game’s end, this title gives the player the opportunity to experience and explore a world and a gripping, award winning, narrative completely on their own fruition. Ultimately, I am focusing my research and resources into how this video game communicates the inevitable change that comes within society, American society especially. However, from this I want to understand how one’s opportunity for personal growth and willingness to change in relation to social and cultural change is understood in the game. The gameplay mechanics of the title thus need to be dissected to understand how they communicate these themes throughout the player’s experience, and their decisions on how to participate in said experience, in this fictionalized yet historically grounded take on the Old West.

**What's Going On in the Game?**

*Red Dead Redemption 2* is technically the third title in the series to be developed and published by Rockstar Games. As stated previously, the object of this study is a prequel to the 2010 game *Red Dead Redemption*, and that title is somewhat of a sequel to the game *Red Dead Revolver*. While several characters and narrative themes carry over from title to title in the series, each primarily focuses on the journey of one main character and the player's experience. The
main narrative of *Red Dead Redemption 2* is set in a fictionalized but historically grounded year of 1899. The experience puts players into the shoes of Arthur Morgan, an outlaw and member of the Van der Linde gang during their travels throughout the title’s portrayals of the Western, Midwestern, and Southern United States.

**What Is Being Studied?**

The game’s mechanics, both in the direct control of the player and those that define the laws of the game, are numerous as they allow said player to interact with the game world. Through the player’s journey in story missions, side quests, challenges, randomized events, and hunting, the player is forced to complete certain actions based on what they know how to do, what they can do it with, and why they want to do it a certain way. Whether the player has earned enough money to buy better weapons and equipment, whether they have better quality clothes to survive in certain environments, and whether the player has the knowhow to use any of these will determine their success. Additionally the use of an honor system, a returning feature from the previous game, changes accordingly to the player's actions towards non-player characters. This honor system can sway how a player wishes to proceed with their journey depending on how they want Arthur’s morals to align by the end of the game. The player is given the tools and mechanics to essentially live the life of a western outlaw in the Old West. Players have to hunt and cook their food, clean their weapons, treat their wounds, and even dress appropriately to survive in cold or hot climates. From a mechanics perspective, the lifestyle and essential historical experience of living in those times are presented in a way that encourages the player to engage with the world and to further delve deeper with how they can make the most out of their
experience. These adventures and activities would ultimately lead to players taking control of Arthur's friend and fellow gang member John Marston. This would then lead to the narrative of the series where players take on the role of John Marston in the original *Red Dead Redemption* to hunt down John’s former associates under the command of corrupted government agents. To determine whether or not they mechanics, and the scenarios for which they are used, are historically accurate needs to be understood through this study. From this, it needs to be underwood whether or not this game shares more in common with American history or American theatrics, on a thematic and aesthetic level, to better understand what and how things are being communicated., and why that matters.

*The Game’s Development & Release*

The game itself began development relatively soon after the original *Red Dead Redemption* released. The monumental task was spread between nearly all of Rockstar’s development studios, aside from the teams who were already working on the next *GTA* sequel. What was especially unique about this project was that development, as indicated from publicly released testimony, focused on drawing influence from real physical locations instead of film or art. Development teams focused on creating a historically or mechanically accurate representation of the time and limitations faced by the game's characters and world. In addition to being constructed unlike any other game before it, the title had to be constructed for future gaming hardware. Rockstar would target building the game for the eighth generation of gaming consoles, a feat that would be tested with the release of *Grand Theft Auto V* in an attempt to see how far their technology could be pushed and optimized. As the title progressed further in its
development, the game’s soundtrack would begin to take shape as it was being composed by Woody Jackson in conjunction with a variety of vocal tracks from Daniel Lanois.

*Red Dead Redemption 2* would finally be released for the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in October 2018 and would later be optimized and released for Microsoft Windows and Google Stadia in November 2019. From the moment of its initial release to its subsequent re-release on PC, the game almost immediately set financial and critical records as one of the most popular video games in recent memory. The game sold more than 23 million copies worldwide, an achievement that managed to elevate Take-Two Interactive (Rockstar’s parent company) to a “net revenue of $1.25 billion in the third quarter, up from $480.8 million in the same period” the previous year (Crecente, 2019). News coverage of the game and its success was picked up by several media outlets outside of the gaming community, being featured on financial reports, major news networks, the *New York Times*, and being the highlight of internet chatter and social media for the better part of the year. The game was even heavily featured on the show South Park, where the show’s writing team managed to “not only make numerous references to Arthur Morgan's Old West adventure, but they did so in such an accurate way as to make the jokes even funnier (McCaffrey, 2018).

*What Shaped Red Dead Redemption 2*

While this game retains many visual, narrative, and social cues from earlier titles in the series, it is undeniable from a gamer’s perspective that this game shares many components of its DNA from Rockstar’s other famous series. The *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) series, a set of fellow action-adventure games that not only set in fictional locations across the United States but one that also chooses to envelop players in settings and narratives that thematically tackle cultural
and historical themes (Rockstar). What makes this series unique is that it is set in more modern spaces, namely the US during the 1960s to the 2010s, while also tackling social and historical conflicts and themes that have been on the forefront of modern events and trends. While GTA focuses on modern issues and cultural entities, the Red Dead series has chosen to approach its social and cultural commentary by reflecting on America and thus having players consider now though their journey in said games. SHOULD I DISCUSS GTA’S HISTORY/IDENTITY MORE TO RELATE TO RDR2? This integration of historical and cultural settings and themes is what makes GTA and other Rockstar titles like the Red Dead series from becoming a “rival to other games and instead sees it transcend the space” to then have the chance “to become something more” (Newzoo, 2018). It was indicated that “after its wildly successful launch, the game averaged around 15 million copies sold a year, had a brief dip in 2018, then jumped to about 20 million last year. With no big release of a new version, and no single-player expansions, the reasons for GTAIV’s sudden uptick in popularity are multifaceted. Over the last 12 months, everything from new content for Grand Theft Auto Online, to Twitch streams, to something as simple as lower prices, seems to have contributed to the game’s impressive sales” (Goslin, 2020). To say that its success affected how Red Dead Redemption 2 would be constructed, and the amount of attention focused upon it not just by its developers but by the gaming community would most certainly be an understatement.

The Perception This Game Faces

Good press and good origins are one thing, but what does the game mean in the grand scheme of things, and what does it mean to the player? On a personal level, the game has been a monumental influence on how I have viewed video games as a medium of entertainment but also
as a means of genuine cultural communication. **Should I go into my feelings about the game at all?** However, the beliefs of one researcher does not speak for a social assumption of a medium and this is especially evident when it comes to video games. As highlighted by Peter Suderman in *The New York Times*, video games “remain something of a second-class cultural medium, even as geek culture has otherwise ascended into the mainstream. Today’s elite tastemakers might be perfectly comfortable discussing the inner workings of the banking system in Westeros, but gaming is still stigmatized, at best as a guilty pleasure, and at worst as a psychologically destructive hobby for socially stunted young men. So the perception is that video games don’t really matter, because they have nothing — or at least nothing important — to say.” Similar perceptions once existed for television and film, being dismissed by cultural critics as not being true artistic mediums. This would not begin to change until the 1948 Supreme Court case, *United States v. Paramount*, where cinema itself can and should be categorized as a legitimate art form and as a means of expression and, admittedly, obscenity.

**The Misconceptions This and Other Games Face**

When it comes to the scope of conversation and critical understanding of video games, aside from the assumption of it being a simple means of entertainment, there has also been a very present misconception about video games as a whole that continues to appear, even with the release of a game like *Red Dead Redemption 2*. Video games have continued to be equated to violent behavior, namely the presence of shooting mechanics, and other violent imagery that is also included in the *Red Dead* Series, in games being responsible for the rise of mass shooting in the United States. **Should I include video game’s incorrect connection to violence, or is it detracting from my point?**
Why Studying *Red Dead Redemption 2* Matters

However, despite opinions on violent expression, despite the misconceptions, and despite the lucrative lure of the industry, *Red Dead Redemption 2* serves as a means of representing video games as a genuine piece of researchable and respectable art. “Like the classic westerns and gangster stories it draws from, it can be crude and violent. But it is also richly cinematic and even literary, serving up breathtaking digital vistas reminiscent of John Ford films along with a mix of deftly scripted stories about outlaws, immigrants, hustlers, con artists, lawmen and entrepreneurs, all trying to eke out an existence on the edges of civilization. It’s a game about power, violence, frontier justice and murky moral choices — a new American epic for the digital age” (Suderman, 2018). It presents an opportunity as to why this game is different from many others that have come before. To a communication scholar especially, this media object has the potential to understand how a deeper emotional and cultural connection can be developed and thus communicated to the audience. Whether it be through visual analysis, and understanding of its narrative, or how it utilizes American cultural tropes to send its message, it is undeniable something significant is being communicated here. What matters now is to understand further why and how they are being communicated through this massive and unique object. Players are immersing themselves into a time, place, and life of those one could only imagine seeing in history books or old west films.

Potential Methods of Analysis

When analyzing a video game like *Red Dead Redemption 2* for its gameplay and how it communicates historical themes, I intend to approach the task through a semiotic, and interactive lens. However, I intend to first break down the various gameplay mechanics and controls
available to the player, on a general level at this time, so that analyzing them through certain frames will paint a clearer picture as to how the game communicates certain themes. The player experiences a significant amount of the game through the avatar of Arthur Morgan, a character who has already experienced the world he moves within and the skills needed to survive in it, despite the fact that the players could not have genuinely learned these skills from the wild west but instead from this experience. The character rarely mentions or indicates that he does not know what to do, so the player is indicated through text or audio cues as to how to perform the mechanic. This process occurs in various points throughout the game whenever new equipment, skills, or objectives become available for the player to use. What needs to be understood is how these core mechanics are utilized or perceived by the player throughout the experience, like Arthur’s health, stamina, and Dead Eye trackers. Should I go into detail on these details here, or wait until the analysis section? These, and the numerous other mechanics of the game, both available to the player or those that simply exist as a rule of the game’s code, need to be understood both in tedious situations or grander setpieces where the player needs to act fast or die needs to be understood. What the player can do will determine what can be communicated to them through these actions, the implications of those actions, whether or not they will continue to act the way they do in the game or shift in a certain direction needs to be understood.

Identifying The Game’s Genre

Should I include a section that details what the genre is, or have it be indicated in the comparisons between the game and other media?
A Cultural & Historical Comparison

The game represents environments, characters, and situations that are portrayed to be akin to those of the American Old West. Sources like those from Thomas DiLorenzo, William Robbins, Richard White, in conjunction with an analysis of what is visible present can help determine what was produced to be historically accurate. The functionality of equipment, the language used by characters, situations and environments that, while fictionalized, are inspired by real life examples may help identify the game as a work as an attempt of historical realism. However, this analysis may also direct the research towards an understanding of the game as a means of entertainment like other western films, shows, and books within the genre. Extreme or exciting situations or characters that take place in the game may have been exaggerated or have no basis on reality. What needs to be understood is whether or not the game seeks to actively portray itself as a work of historical representation, or as an adaptation of western iconography synonymous with what has been portrayed in the media. An analysis on both the genuine history of the American Old West and the west’s representation in the media will help determine Red Dead Redemption 2’s identity and thus how it communicates to the audience, depending on how it portrays itself.

Prosthetic Memory In The Game

In conjunction with how the game identifies itself in its genre and its degree of cultural or historical realism, what must also be determined is the capacity of its players to be engaged with the game. After all, a game is only successful if players keep playing it, and with that task there is also a need to understand why players engross themselves in the experience. Tying into the game’s mechanics and narrative, Red Dead Redemption 2 needs to be understood for how it
potentially seeks to immerse the player. One avenue that may be the use of the game’s environment, characters, and story comments to give the player a sense of prosthetic memory. Prosthetic memory, as corroborated by authors like Alison Landsberg, can be described as being behaviors, artificial memories, or the general mindsets that can be derived from engaging in certain experiences or encounters, potentially via an object of media, that can result in some degree of engagement. By establishing the player in the role of Arthur Morgan, a character with a significant amount of backstory, established relationships with characters and places, and an environment with an established history and culture that bears some relation to reality, the presence of prosthetic memory as a reason to play is possible. This can then build upon how the game communicates to its players, by placing them in a situation where they themselves feel to have some degree of significance because they have lived and continue to be living a life vicariously through the game’s Arthur Morgan. Other studies into prosthetic memory in video games, like that of Emil Hammer on the game Mafia 3’s representation of racism in the southern United States or Lissa Gilbert’s analysis of the Assassin’s Creed franchise and its presentation of history and the human experience, can help flesh this approach more. Understanding why players want to play may make it easier to understand what they are being communicated through their omitted experience.

**What Happens Visually**

Since video games are a heavily visual experience, it would make sense to utilize a semiotic approach to understanding how gameplay mechanics communicate to the player. The video, audio, and environmental components that contribute to the experience overall and the mechanics themselves need to be picked apart to understand what they accomplish.
Communicatively. Semiotic analysis can break down the three aspects of the visual material: Contact, Distance and Point of View. Contact is the connections made between the viewer and the actors within the image. Distance is how far the viewer and the actor are between each other. Then there is the Point of View, where the angle for or means of experiencing the media object translates or engages the observer to the actors within the media (Visual Social Semiotics, 2016). While a majority of this explanation of semiotics relates to motionless images, it is important to note that semiotics is not just an understanding of base visuals. Rose Gillian’s *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* helps bring this into focus as it is explained how an image, especially those in motion like in a video or in this case a video game, can be taken apart and traced as to how it works and interacts with things and people. How a player interacts with what is seen and how that player processes what may happen later with what is seen directly relates to what is being broadly communicated, and thus a necessary approach to this analysis.

A visual understanding can then direct this research towards how the mechanics themselves are a component of the game’s narrative or story which then acts as a form of thematic communication. This idea was previously hinted at in Patric Phillips’ work in identifying the significance of genre, and the visual signifiers that can characterize a film, television show, or novel. This leads to how the story of the game is not functional without the player’s interaction and recognition of activities within the game that “help bridge the gaps left in the computer-generated virtual world” (Wei, 2010). From the idea of the story being communicated through player action, it is impossible to not mention how Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm plays a factor in this frame of study. Specifically, through the game’s
storytelling techniques it can be analyzed to show how the gameplay communicates thematic messages.

How The Narrative Plays a Role

Fisher's approach to understanding communication through rhetoric in a story’s narrative, his theory does not necessarily translate to the overall story of Red Dead Redemption 2. The object of this study being an open world video game, there are various stories and various outcomes that may occur based on the player’s actions, thus approaching this media object broadly with the narrative paradigm as a guid would not work. Instead, this object can be approached with Fisher’s theory under the understanding that rather than looking at the larger story and side missions as the necessary narrative that rhetorically communicates, instead Arthur’s journey should be the primary focus. While not every moment the player interacts with the world as Arthur is necessarily a significant part of the game’s story, there are enough narrative focused moments in the entire experience to analyze rhetorically for what they are stating. Walter Fisher indicates this as a potential approach to analysis because at the heart of any story is a character. As the character, or in this case the player as well, certain challenges will be faced and the consequences of those challenges will be owned by the character. Those consequences translate towards more story beats later in the journey and thus compels the narrative not only to progress but to communicate overarching themes to the player and audience. From this, there is also a need to draw connections between the narrative of the game and the rhetorical components of said narrative needed to communicate to the audience. While traditional components of the narrative paradigm can be found within Red Dead Redemption 2’s story, as they would be in film, television, and novels, the mechanics of a video game present a
unique approach to communication. As previously stated, the player is given the opportunity to perform certain actions, refine skills, and interact in a world that is presented to be authentic to that of the Old West. However, the player is not necessarily forced to use every skill or action available to them to progress in the game’s main story as Arthur but is instead encouraged to approach the story in a manner of their choosing. This is a point evident in readings like those of Marie-Laure Ryan, David Herman, and Michael Nitsche who investigate the scope of digital games and how what is available for the player to do creates a sense of agency or compulsion from the player to complete the game and its story. Aside from whatever character or story components personal draws the player, it is how the player exists and performs that not only compels the player to explore what other ways of playing they can do but also to see how their decisions affect the story’s finale. Further analysis will hope to determine how the narrative of the game utilizes the game’s unique mechanics as rhetorical tools to communicate and to fully understand what is being communicated to the player, if anything at all.

Analyzing Red Dead Redemption 2

Analyzing Rockstar’s most recent, and arguably most revered game, Red Dead Redemption 2, is an attempt at understanding what is actually going on in the game, how players participate in it, and the actual reasoning as to why players immerse themselves in the experience. After all, the point of this study is to understand what is being communicated, how it's reaching its audience, and why it ultimately matters. Red Dead Redemption 2 is an action-adventure video game developed by Rockstar games and released in 2018. It primarily puts players into the role of the fictionalized character Arthur Morgan, an outlaw and member of the Van der Linde gang, in the year 1899. The story centers on Arthur and his fellow criminals
facing the decline of what is known as the American Old West. Civilization begins to encroach on the untamed frontier where others of his ilk once flourished and are now instead under the constant pursuit of government authorities, rival gangs, and other threats in this now radically different world.

Going into this project, it became obvious that the first step in understanding how this game communicates is by understanding what is being communicated. Themes surrounding the Old American West, and what it means to exist in a changing world are ones that will be primarily examined for not only what they say in this game but how the game interprets them when compared to other western style media. Film, television, and literature have been a vibrant home for the Old West in modern spaces, no matter if they are fiction or nonfiction.

**DOES THERE NEED TO BE MORE INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS?**

**The Player’s Journey as an Outlaw**

To grasp an understanding of what the player will experience in this game, it is logical to assume that it is necessary to know what the game is truly all about. Being a single player game, *Red Dead Redemption 2* focuses heavily on its story as much as it does on the game’s world, characters, and gameplay. The game is set in the dawn of the 20th century, several years before the narrative of 2010’s *Red Dead Redemption*. At this point in history, both fictional and actual, the West was in a state of great change. Instead of the traditional chaos and lawlessness the audience assumes the American frontier to be in an experience associated with cowboys and tumbleweeds, the grip of federal bureaucracy and industry has begun to take root and spread through the frontier. This is a problem for the player, or for their primary character, Arthur Morgan, an outlaw and gang member who is forced to essentially witness his very way of life.
seeming to inexorably come to an end. Throughout this experience, the player must decide between “committing vicious crimes and opening on their desire to simply be free and live a self-sustaining frontier lifestyle without the expansion of industrialized America hemming them in” (Humble, 2019). This leads into one of the core components of an open-world game like *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the ability to do whatever the player wants to do. While this is admittedly an ability with some limits, being in a world limited by some degree of code or programming, but within those barriers there is genuinely very little the player is not capable of doing. Whenever the player leaves camp, there is a possibility they may not return for several days simply on the basis that they are capable so much early on when the game starts. Players have the capability of surviving in the wilderness with a small camp, hunting some of the 200 species of animals that roam the game world.

Whether the player seeks to then move forward into a town and assist people there by hunting escaped criminals from a local jail or assisting with other tasks that remain optional but have an impact if completed. In one instance, the player may hear the cries of a young man trapped beneath a gun store, if confronting the owner about this, threatening him at gunpoint, the owner will take you to his basement to kind that he had the young man chained to the wall. Fee him, and Arthur will have the option to kill the gun owner, who would eventually be replaced, or keep him alive and have access to anything in the store at a discount for sparing his life. In another situation, Arthur begins to investigate some significantly gruesome killings around the town of Valentine, only to eventually find the lair of a serial killer. After apprehending him, Arthur brings him to the local sheriff’s office but in attempting to put the killer in jail, he breaks free and attempts to kill the sheriff. Arhtur can either kill the man or let him kill the sheriff. This
will then affect the dynamic of the town since the sheriff will be dad and no one would be able to pay you for bounties. Finally there is a situation where you overhear that a cabin in the woods holds a great deal of wealth outside the town of Strawberry. You can go there, only to find an old lady and a docky outside said cabin, she is definitely not pleased to see you there. You can leave, with nothing, kill her, take everything inside the cabin, or do nothing to her, and still take everything. The third option will see her get on her donkey, yelling that she’s going to tell her sons about you. If you return a few days later, Arthur will be confronted by three armed men. They can be easily dealt with and Arthur can return on his merry way. However, returning to the cabin after killing the tree men will find the old lady, dead in her bed in the very late stages of decomposition. It can then be assumed that she either died of a broken heart or the loss of her sons or that lack of anyone taking care of her resulted in her death.

The goal of the game is not necessarily to become a maniacal, mass murdering outlaw where just a single step in a small town will make everyone near you run away in terror, there is nothing stopping you from doing so. Law enforcement will of course come to stop you, or the price on your head will grow so high that a literal army of bounty hunters will continuously pursue you. What tempers or gauges the player in this aspect of the game, aside from one’s ability to defend themselves, is their own connection to Arthur, his friends, and their effect on the grander scheme of the story. The player may want to be treated fondly by his fellow gang members, rather than despised, or he might want to tread the streets of a town without being chased by those he had wronged, but this is not an attitude forced to have by the game but instead one the game opens the player up to. With every action in the game, one’s relationships with the characters of the world will change. An occurrence noticeable in certain characters’
dialogue and behaviors towards the player and Arthur, and whether the player seeks to undo what they have done and make others like them again will depend on how much damage they may have already done (Crecente, 2018). However, exactly is the player capable of doing in this gaming world that causes such significant effects?

**The Player’s Actions & The Gang**

*Red Dead Redemption 2* provides numerous levels of gameplay mechanics for which players can both survive and thrive in the game’s depiction of a modernizing America. Arthur Morgan is capable of hunting and skinning various wild animals to consume, sell, or make clothes from. Arthur and the player are then capable of purchasing, stealing, maintaining, and customizing various guns and wares. The player is even capable of feeding and maintaining their horse, a steed who becomes faster and more reliable as one’s connection and commitment to them grows throughout the gaming experience (Wills, 2018). Additionally, the player is given the opportunity to dictate how Arthur dresses and appears throughout the game. Granted some clothes provide better protection and functionality in certain environments in the game based on their respective climate, but the player has control on whether to pay attention to this feature. Hats, gloves, jackets, shirts, boots, gun holsters, even the style and shape of one’s beard are all available to be stylized, crafted, or purchased in the many shops in the game’s world. These options for customizing Arthur are more than likely meant to strengthen the relationship between the player and their unique Arthur Morgan, with the potential of facilitating identification with the character, themselves, and the game’s world (Weinreich & Saunderson 2003). It is this interactive...
character relationship that “allows for an immersive experience and through this both a deeper and wider understanding of the played past” (Boom, 2020).

How the player interacts with the rest of the Van der Linde gang and rest of camp itself relates to both the player’s identification with Arthur, but also the world's characters and environment. The Van der Linde gang’s philosophy on community is reflected by how Arthur, the player, interacts with the camp and vice versa. Food, medicine and other provisions don't belong to anyone exclusively and are open to be taken and shared, despite being in limited supply. In turn, each member is expected to contribute valuables or funds to improving the camp, upgrades of which are chosen by the player. Either pay for better food stocks to feed oneself and the rest of the camp, boosting morale, or buy more ammunition at the detriment to the others. At the same time, the player can spend an extensive portion of time solely at the camp, feeding the camp’s chickens, tending to the horses, chopping wood, cleaning dishes, providing fresh meats for the camp cook, playing games, or simply talking to people and possibly helping them out with favors. The game does this to re-examine what words like ‘family’, ‘property', and ‘freedom’ can mean. This is ever more evident as “the law gradually tightens the noose around the Van Der Linde gang’s neck, it is forced to confront the question of how an alternative way of living can exist in a totalising system that doesn’t share its principles” (Walker-Emig, 2019). This variety becomes more than just an opportunity for the player to experience the game in its highly detailed splendor, but to instead take the agency to explore and experience the camp and express it further in similar small but impactful tasks in the games world. For example, in a player’s experience, Jacob Geller’s, he mentioned an experience in the game where he would “rob a train in the morning, help a fella catch a fish at lunch, then get a haircut and a shave in town, before
finally hunting a deer and bringing it back to camp for dinner. Along the way, I might run into a stranger out on the road who’d beg for help and likely pull me into a whole new suite of activities” (Geller, 2019). From there he moved away from the clutches of humanity and instead migrated towards Red Dead Redemption 2’s vast wilderness where he “hunted, not for superficial aesthetic rewards, but because I needed the meat to sustain myself over the long, lonely journeys. I happily brushed, fed, and cared for my horse because he represented the only companionship I had in the desert expanse” (Geller, 2019). While a picture of what is available for the player to do is better understood, how exactly do these mechanics relate to the history and culture the game was based off of, and did any grander themes carry over with this representation of that history and culture?

**The Game Versus The American West**

When analyzing a media object that centers on a time period or culture that actually existed, it is important to discern what is genuine about that time period or cultural situation from which the object was inspired. From that point, how exactly did Red Dead Redemption 2 depict America’s journey of and away from the Old West, and how does it compare to other media objects that attempted the very same feat? On a utility level, the game strives for realism in both how the characters act and also what they are allowed to do in this western world. The Old West, on a grander perspective, was initially a time in American history that began with the completion of the railroads towards the Pacific Coast during the time of Reconstruction. This would consequently lead to the settlement and extensive development of territories populated by white settlers seeking to mine, farm, and ranch, African-American settlers seeking prosperity in a newly free land, and a significant flow of Chinese railroad workers to aid in said marvel of
engineering. The sprawling Great Plains would dramatically change as massive herds of bison were wiped out, massive farms took shape, and the utilization of the railroad and grazing land provided an ample opportunity for the booming cattle to market industry (The American West, 1865-1900). From this description alone, the game acts as a detailed depiction of the way “civilization” was advancing American West at the turn of the last. Everything from boom towns being constructed for the sake of selling livestock, to an area of the game’s world where a railroad is actively being built (and as time progresses in the game even usable by train). The setting of the game is undeniably accurate for its depictions of industrialized, modernized, towns like Saint Denis (an homage to cities like New Orleans) and Blackwater, or the ramshackle towns whose only buildings consist of a saloon, general store, and train station like the towns of Armadillo, Strawberry, or Tumbleweed. These allusions to real life are not just aesthetically present in the game’s environments, but in fact exist in the game’s use of stylized photography to paint this world not as one that references reality but one that could exist in our reality.

Photographs are present “everywhere in the game, from the mocked up, sepia shots of cabins and landscapes it shows you while loading (labelled with dates and places), to bedside pictures of absent family and old sweethearts, through to missions where you must photograph retired gunslingers, or visit a portrait studio” (Stokes, 2021). A sense of history within the game makes it more real to the player, but what mechanics in the game make further connections to American history?

Arthur Morgan is an outlaw and in a gang of outlaws who often took part in some degree of exciting adventures, so how does this aspect of the game relate to history? This is where the analysis shifts from an understanding of American history in this object to how the media object
utilizes a particular angle of history to serve its purpose. Specifically, as indicated from the Library of Congress’s collection of information about the actual American West, it is a common myth that the action, lawlessness, and relative danger of the times actually existed. Such myths have shaped society’s views of the American West, but where did these myths originate and why do they manage to influence such a detailed video game? Examples of this include Arthur’s need for the player to manage his health, namely heating certain foods and some degree of exercise. By being active like running, riding, and swimming, the player will raise Arthur’s stamina and health retention while certain foods and beverages can have a benefit or depleting effect on Arthur. Whether overeating or starving, Arthur will begin to appear different to the player and other characters (who will call you out if your health deteriorates). Similar “realistic” aspects to the game’s mechanics include the fact that Arthur can only carry a certain amount of weapons at one time. If the player would like to equip certain weapons the player will have to return to their horse’s saddle and physically equip and carry their weapons, tools, or clothes. However, if the player loses any of these items in the wild, they will be permanently lost to the player. Similar lasting effects on the world can be found in the corpses the player, Arthur, leaves behind. In the wilderness, after defending oneself from a bandit or rival gang members, the player can return to the site of the battle to find the bodies of the fallen still there, but discolored and showing signs of decomposition. A similar trait is featured on the animals killed by the player, and if the player is hoping to bring a recently slain deer back to camp for food, then they better do so quickly because the animal will only continue to rot the longer it is exposed and may become unusable. These mechanics are some of the finer details in the game's larger experience that indicate the
game’s attempt at real life simulation. However, this only touches the surface of the game’s attempt to portray real American life in the American West, or a lack thereof.

END WITH Hyde’s INFO ON DEVOLUTION OF WESTERN ICONOGRAPHY TO LEAD INTO NEXT SECTION

**Western Films Versus Reality**

Simply put, the entertainment industry shaped how the American West has been remembered on a massive cultural level, to the point where the actual history of the American West can still be inspiring and incredible, but most certainly calmer and more boring when compared to some of the depictions out there. For several decades “‘Westerns’ ruled Hollywood. ‘Epics’ and ‘B-westerns’ filled movie theaters from the 1920s to the 1950s—and dominated American television programming in the 1950s” and from there became an engrained component of American cinema (Aron, 2016). The Western has often been considered to be an avenue of popular filmmaking because of the very nature of the American West and the rise from it. It is a “well of cultural symbols meant to capture the essence of America, including the freedom of the open frontier and the righteous self-determination of man” (Williams, 2016). The symbolism is there, but what lacks from the history is excitement, because there was not a massive crime wave of murdering bandits, nor was there a shift from once civilized settlers to gun waving savages.

POSSIBLY TO INCLUDE MORE EXAMPLES OF WESTERN MOVIES TO ILLUSTRATE TROPES

Regardless, it is the depiction of this that made the themes of the American frontier far more enduring and marketable. The extravagant sets, exotic animals, unknown Indian tribes, gun-bearing women, and brawny men were already there, but what needed to be conjured was
some degree of action or almost otherworldly lawless nature to the West to attract audiences. Audiences who have never known the reality of the contemporary West, much less the Old West, could bear witness to the adventurous, dangerous, magnanimous, virtuous heroes and villains of a story that would continue to dazzle their imaginations (Macauley, 2010). Stories of genuine historical outlaws such as: Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Cole Younger, Sam Bass, John Wesley Hardin, Bob Dalton, Bill Dalton, Bill Doolin, and many others have representations that depicts more of their legend than reality. This fact alone provides a degree of insight into basic paradoxes of American culture itself when it comes to its identity and remembering its own history. In a way, these iterations of these myths within “both the cultural and geographical landscapes of the new mythic West embrace what can be called ‘psychic trophies, tools for marketing authentic experience, ‘making the replica more seductive than the original’”(Robbins, 1999). This subversion of representation in regards to historical figures is nothing new in American films about its frontier.

The filmography of actors like Clint Eastwood and John Wayne especially demonstrates the creation of an antihero, one who lacks the conventional characteristic of a hero yet is still treated and portrayed as such (Gould, 2019). Red Dead Redemption 2 is at its core a “western” experience, a part of a genre that spans the very existence of entertainment in the United States. It is a genre that, despite having numerous interpretations and stories told in the era of outlaws and cowboys, is defined by certain signifiers that give the title its identity in the eyes of the public. The music, the aesthetic, the vocabulary, the very perspective the characters have regarding the world make the game what it is at a cultural level, akin to films like 1966’s The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, or John Wayne’s True Grit (Phillips, 1996) This kind of cultural
representation further discussed by Richard White is his reading, titled *Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border: American Social Bandits*, which further delves into this media representation of the Old West and how it established itself as the cultural truth in a sense. The outlaw is an especially interesting case in both the context of its portrayal in history and media but especially for its portrayal in *Red Dead Redemption 2*. The American Outlaw became a symbol of a larger “structural oppositions of law and justice, individualism and community, nature and civilization-never adequately reconciled in American life” (White, 1981). Such a perception on genuine historical terms was then assimilated into the way that in “classic western, the social bandit becomes the western hero or a figure of great appeal. The western is not the simple-minded celebration of the triumph of American virtue over evil that it is so often ignorantly and unjustly presumed to be,” but instead it is the opposite” (White, 1981). It became prevalent that the exact opposite was occurring respectively in American culture. The classic western poses the hero as not necessarily a symbol of justice but as a character cast between contrasting values of which are incredibly attractive to the audience for that character’s default magnetic nature of symbolizing individualism. This became the default because as the industry evolved, it became necessary to have these, almost antihero style of characters because they must represent the rugged or “lawless” nature of the Old West.

From this, comparing *Red Dead Redemption 2* to the American West in the media may be more logical than comparing it to genuine American history. This could lead to the conjecture that this game, much like some of the other media portrayals of the West, is completely removed from the historical realities that supposedly inspired it and thus does not deserve this degree of historical research. However, its homage to these films and its aesthetical connections to history
make it a bountiful representation of both cultures. This is accomplished by how it communicates historical or narrative themes through its thematic display. An example of this can be derived from the video game *Mafia III*, where a player takes on the role of a black man living in the Southern United States during 1968. The segregation, police violence, and social prejudice of the time existed in the game and acted as a historical and thematic anchor on the experience (Hammar, 2020). While situations in that game were extremely exaggerated and action oriented, the time, setting, and citations the game puts the player through was utilized to communicate the game’s timely message towards the audience. Video games like *Red Dead Redemption 2*, like the rest of the technologised mass culture, can bridge the barrier between cultures separated by time. There is then the inauguration of “transformed memory by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives about the past” (Landsberg, 2018). The player could never genuinely know what it was like to live in the era of the Old West, but it is with these new technologies of memory building that allows one to have access to a realistic, relatable, would that is no longer limited to by those who are left to remember them, but can now be experienced by many. It is blatantly indicated in the work of John Wills’ study, *Pixel Cowboys and Silicon Gold Mines: Videogames of the American West*, its indicated that as long as the gaming environment “resembled public expectations of the Wild West, and thus included its fair share of cowboys, outlaws, and Indians” the genuine authenticity of the simulation can be overlooked because “nobody had deserted western-themed Frontierland in Disneyland due to its historical inaccuracy” (Wills, 2008). However, what has made *Red Dead Redemption 2* different is not just the entertainment factor of playing it, it is the journey the player takes on as Arthur Morgan
immersion derived not just from one’s imagination of being in the Wild West but being able to interact with it that makes the experience significant.

*Film’s Effect on The Game*

While being a charming outlaw, Arthur draws on the appeal established towards American audiences as he is also a complex character in a complex story to be drawn to. Arthur especially faces the primary conflict the setting itself is facing, being that civilization and the ‘new world’ are constantly encroaching on the wilderness and wildness once appreciated. Arthur himself journals for the player his fear of the “impending storm” and how there’s no place for him or people like him in civilization. He sees that his place in this adventure may soon come to an end, and knowing that drives him and the player to make the most out of that time they have left (Gould, 2019). The player simply has to look around the city they may be in, the downtrodden nature their camp has become, or the growing number of friends being left behind in shallow graves to know that the end of whatever you're doing is nigh. The game allows the audience to experience that character's journey with them in a way that film, television, and novels have never been able to accomplish. This player involvement comes into play as *Red Dead Redemption 2* further connects with western films and perhaps over exemplifying the portrayal of violence in the American West. INCLUDE SECTION ON ARTHUR’S “Django” MOMENT WITH THE KKK

In this aspect of the game, it's simple to highlight that scholars reminding us about the can’t “real” West compete with the media's visual impact, especially since no one expects these representations to be fully accurate to the historical material. This is because the media has often adopted the postmodern credo: “make it up, it is easier than research” (Udall, 2000). This ties into
the game’s use of violence as a means of accomplishment and progression, a trait shared by the need for dozens of movies portraying the nineteenth-century West as hotbeds of anarchy and violence to move the story forward. In reality, settlements take it upon themselves to restrain their own behavior, despite the lack of government or military authority in the region. It is also notable to state that “the real culture of violence in the American West of the latter half of the nineteenth century sprang from the U.S. government’s policies toward the Plains Indians,” a phenomenon also heavily featured in Red Dead Redemption 2 (DiLorenzo, 2010). As the players are capable of living out famous gunfights depicted in films like Tombstone or True Grit, they are doing so without actually committing real violent acts on real people. The violence is thus able to be utilized to a greater extent because it is this frontier violence which forges the essential American character for the narrative and for the player. It is then reasonable to assume that this is indeed a historical game which allows players to ignore the real-world implications of the violence they are performing.

How Does Narrative Factor into Gameplay?

LEAD/DIVIDE WITH DISCUSSION ON TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE GAME DESIGN AND INCLUDE INFO INTO SECTION WITH MCV EXCERPTS

A topic that has been previously indicated in this analysis, the narrative of a video game like Red Dead Redemption 2 needs to be of a certain caliber. This is not to sound overly pompous or superior to other games, but simply a game with such intricate details and opportunities for the player needs a narrative to fit such attention. Being a game developed by Rockstar Games, a game studio that has constantly developed games with significant critical and financial success, there was little doubt from an audience perspective that the story would be impressive, since their studio was also responsible for other games with famous narratives like
the original *Red Dead Redemption* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Before delving into what made *Red Dead Redemption* 2’s story and the delivery of said story important, it needs to be understood how video games as a medium actually approach storytelling as they are by nature unconventional when compared to other tools like books or films. A concept further developed by Marie-Laure Ryan, a literary scholar and critic, suggests that the means from which a story is told can help develop a user-centric or direct involvement in how the story is told, an approach that has taken form in open world games like *Red Dead Redemption* 2. In an article titled *Time and Space in Digital Game Storytelling*, a collection of points from various researchers, the kind of narrative most associated with video games is described as “a form of understanding of the events a player causes, triggers, and encounters inside a video game space” (Nitsche, 2008). A focus on audiences’ individual approach to a narrative, especially one that demands greater levels of engagement by the audience, potentially gives room for a user-centric approach to games (Ryan, 2001). Video games, at their core, give the player control of someone or something to create an engaging and entertaining experience. To this end, video game narratives have often utilized a non-linear means of storytelling, a means of having a story, its characters, and environments branch into their own thing that can only be recognized or appreciated by the player who helped build them. This allows for the possibility of multiple outcomes and the reasoning that what the player did was unique and mattered to both the story and its characters (Wolf, 2001). It is the innovation of the medium itself that may also be contributing to this style of storytelling. While there are opportunities for traditional media outlets to utilize unique
subversions to a story or genre’s narrative tropes, it is the player’s drive and decision making in games that makes the stories significant and memorable. Melissa Somerdin states that video games’ “unique interactive qualities and use of nodes, video games have much to offer to the literary realm, whether through enhanced traditional storytelling techniques or new, innovative ones. Their immersive characteristics help strengthen the suspension of disbelief and emotional immersion as well as offer new opportunities like the Future Narrative and medium-based plot reversals” (Somerdin, 2016). However, what immersive characteristics exist for Arthur’s journey and what makes them significant when communicated to the player?

Arthur Morgan’s journey is unique when compared to other video game protagonists because he is self-aware that his time is coming to an end along with every other outlaw. From this, Arthur moves away from the traditional character trait found in other western outlaws in the media and instead places the character in situations where the player is actively worried and investing in the story. As Arthur worries about his fellow gang members, so does the player. As Arthur wonders if he has ever contributed anything good to this world, so does the player. As Arthur wonders if he still has time to rectify his many wrongs, or if he is ultimately doomed to die, so dies the player (Gould, 2019). It is this connection to the game and its characters which compels them to act and thus play out their experience in a way that they deem it should be experienced, thus fitting into the branching narrative the game allows itself. Will Arthur make up for the many years he spent robbing and killing people, or will he die alone and hated for what he has done? This then begins to hint at how the game utilizes certain mechanics of the game to help build and communicate the game’s narrative, the world from which to explore, and the situations that players will be confronted with. While combat mechanics help progress the game
forward, along with horse riding techniques help one get from place to place, it is ultimately how the player navigates the game through their collected skills and the games honor system that helps communicate the narrative to the player.

**The Narrative Paradigm & The Honor System**

It is at this point where the role of the narrative paradigm begins to take hold because it is this conflict and all subsequent conflicts Arthur and the player face that presents the quandary of who’s in control. Is the player strictly in control of Arthur, does the narrative bind Arthur to a specific fate, who and what has agency over what is going on? It is the acceptance of the narrative paradigm here, in how the game communicates to the player, because it introduces the idea of who actually owns their actions in regards to “specific instances of discourse, regardless of form, provide the most trustworthy, reliable, and desirable guides to belief and to behavior, and under what conditions” (Fisher, 1985). The story of the game, and it's direct positioning of the player to think and do certain things is certainly one aspect of communicating to the player, but is there a certain mechanic that makes the player dictate what is right and wrong, and thus dictate how Arthur will live his life?

This ‘honor system’ is not a new feature to the *Red Dead* series nor in video games in general, but it plays a significant role in how the player’s actions in this game are looked at by both the world’s characters and by the player themselves. This is visibly indicated by marking Arthur’s actions with a large bar that stretches from dishonorable red to honorable white. When one robs a random traveler on the road, they are accompanied by a red indicator and a deep bell sound; however, when one does something positive like helping a man out of a bear trap and
giving them a ride to the nearest doctor on your horse, the player is rewarded with a white indicator and the sound of chimes.

This mechanic is not necessarily just a phenomenon that occurs in every action the player takes in the game on their own time, but one that has a role to play in the player’s journey in the story or side adventure. An example of this system being present in the game is when the player, Arthur, is given the opportunity to help an old man retrieve his belongings from an old house, from which he was evicted. However, investigating the home leads to the discovery that the man was a slave catcher for nearby plantations. After Arthur approaches the man about this discovery, and subsequently tosses the man’s items into a fire as said old man weeps, the player is then given control again. You can either kill the man or leave him alone, but the game will give the player a dishonorable or honorable moniker, thus representing the game’s normative symbolic messaging towards the nature of violence and the consequences of one’s actions (Martin, 2018).

The player is experiencing the realities of this world through Arthur who has and will have to continue existing in it, and from that the player is being given the responsibilities of that kind of power. Through their capabilities in the game, the player is being symbolically told that what they do matters in some way, though every gunfight or conversation something new and genuine is communicated. It is an integration of a moral system that can be translated as loosely or as rigidly by the player as they see fit, “reminiscent of the myth of the ‘Code of the West,’ an idealization of lawlessness” (Hoffman, 2019). These detailed options to participate in the game can themselves work to display historical or cultural systems and how they may or may not work in either a digital space or a real space (Bogost, 2008). Ultimately, a player can completely ignore the honor meter or choose to depend on it for all their decision making. But ultimately,
these choices play a role in how the game plays out and how everyone and everything in the game interacts with you as Arthur Morgan.

**The Need to Keep Going**

In addition to this use of honor as a driving mechanic in the game, there is also how the game improves the skills of the player to further tell this story. As video games typically progress, the player is initially just starting to get used to the controls and mechanics of the game. As one’s experience progresses, friends are made in the game, skills are learned, and weapons improve. By the end of a typical video game the player is almost unbeatable by any if not all foes (Sheehan, 2019). This “dangling the carrot in front of you” mechanic exists in games like this because it is the growing competence of the player and their almost constant strive to master certain game challenges that makes the player want to be better outside of any emotional attachment to characters or the story. It is the “motivation for exploratory and playful activities in the service of competence” (Trepte, 2010). While this is a similar case in this game the narrative shakes things up by not only having Arthur become terminally ill with Tuberculosis and permanently weaker, but the stakes become even higher as the law continues to inch ever closer and enemies become harder and more numerous. 

Despite the need to explore every corner of the game’s world and do everything the game has to offer, the spread of civilization into the West that brought an end to the lifestyle of the actual American West and an end to the lifestyle Arthur once lived and the player who wished to rekindle through their experience in the game, a reality only complemented by the actual decline of Arthur’s life (Viswanath, 2018). Arthur and the player have every reason to just stop and let
the buzzards come for them, but they do not, as they have greater motivations to continue.

Despite becoming sicker and sicker by the day, the player and Arthur trudge forwards and continue to improve to protect their friends and loved ones, make more money, or simply to survive. Even in the final acts of the game, Arthur and the player are still learning and improving their skills for whatever may come, and no one told them to. The game created a sense of necessity and desperation through its use of textual, visual, and auditory cues for players to draw inferences and drive the game to completion in a certain, and in this case, emotionally devastating way through a series of events (Herman, 2002). The game essentially works against you, but it is that difficulty and the new means of playing the game that not only supports the narrative, but compels the player and Arthur to do as much as they can with the time they have left. No one necessarily told them to do this, but the opportunities and mechanics in the game made it so. Ultimately, it is the final words of Arthur Morgan that say it best, he proclaimed that “In the end, I tried. I really did.” a sentiment shared by every player that followed that journey with him.

POSSIBLE GIVE FURTHER DETAIL ON ARTHUR’S AND THE PLAYER’S MENTALITY IN THIS SECTION
MENTION THE PLAYER’S EVENTUAL ROLE AS JOHN MARSTON AS A LEAD UP TO THE ORIGINAL RED DEAD REDEMPTION
INCLUDE MINOR SUMMATION OF ANALYSIS WITH INFO FROM Solarski

Final Conclusions

*Red Dead Redemption 2* is less of a retelling of American history nor is it an adaptation of American “western” stories, it is a means of communicating and empathizing with an audience that just so happens to be set in a fictionalized American Old West. The player’s extensive journey as Arthur Morgan, their time as John Marston, the gunfights, the horse riding,
the world, the towns, even the barbershops where players can spend horse styling their hair each
work to communicate the game’s narrative and identity to the player through the player’s vary
actions. Cinematic cutscenes may work to give greater context or film-esque quality to the
experience, but it is that player’s role in the gang, the world, and the story at large that makes the
game’s overarching tale worth experiencing, and is why players dive in and keep playing. The
players feel like they matter in the game because not only does Arthur and the gang need them,
but the world of *Red Dead Redemption 2* needs them because it is a world full of detail and
intractability that is not only available to the player but engaging enough to make it feel worth it.
The game may lean closer to the cinematic excitement over fully grounded realism and historical
accuracy, but like film, television, and novels, it is less the shape of the ride but the excitement of
the ride that makes it memorable. It is ultimately the player’s agency is what propels the themes
to be graced to the player, and with that I want to understand in greater depth how *Red Dead
Redemption 2* communicates its narrative and experiences to that player through its mechanics
and details as a single player video game. Other games that have accomplished similar feats
deserve to be studied and deserve greater attention outside the gaming community, but are cursed
by the mere label that they are just objects of a hobby. It is through experiences like this, like *Red
Dead Redemption 2*, that actively display the value of video games not only as a medium of
entertainment but an object of genuine feeling, narrative, and communication. I do this not just
because I am enthralled with the game, its characters, and its story, but primarily because I
believe what it has to say deserves to be heard by those who are willing to listen.

DOES THIS CONCLUSION WORK? SHOULD IT BE EXPANDED OR REWORKED?

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone
who has not. – CTN
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