Assassin's Creed II: Exploring the Boundaries of Freedom in Videogames

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Abstract

Via means of Ubisoft's action-adventure videogame *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) this essay aims to determine and explore the extent to which freedom can be experienced in both a philosophical and algorithmic sense. Focusing on three modes—narrative, exploratory, and tactical freedoms—this essay examines how games like *Minecraft*, *Skyrim*, and *Halo Wars* embody these freedoms and compares them with *Assassin's Creed II* as the main case study. Through the philosophies of Hegel, Sartre, and Foucault, alongside contemporary computer science theories, the analysis highlights how player agency and game design can shape the experience of freedom or create the illusion of said freedom. The study ultimately demonstrates that while videogames offer varied expressions of freedom, they could also impose inherent constraints through coding and design.

Introduction

In recent years, videogames have not only surged in popularity and have expanded across various platforms; the aim of videogames has shifted, if not broadened, as well. A notable example is developer Ubisoft's (1986) modified version of their *Assassin's Creed* games, branded as *Discovery Tour by Assassin's Creed*. Whereas the 'original' *Assassin's Creed* games centre around a secret brotherhood of assassins, whose goal is to assassinate the in-game oppressors, this edition allows players to explore ancient Greece or Egypt without the 'conflicts' or 'gameplay limitations' found in the regular game (Ubisoft 2018). The creation of such a version, stripped of the core elements that typically define the *Assassin's Creed* experience, raises important questions about what truly defines a videogame, as the line between in-game freedom and pre-determined goals starts to fade. The history of videogames is rich and diverse, and the study of games has evolved into a specialised field within ludology—the study of games. Gonzalo Frasca (1972) in his seminal work, *Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and Differences between (Video)Games and Narrative* (1999), contrasts ludology with 'narratology', a concept developed to unify narrative research across various disciplines. Frasca advocates for a unified approach to game studies, bridging fields such as psychology, anthropology, economics, and sociology, and proposes 'ludology' as a framework (Frasca 1999). The broad range of theoretical frameworks which ludology consists of, has served as an inspiration for writing this essay, aiming to bridge the various disciplines and ultimately get a better understanding of freedom in videogames via numerous 'well-known' philosophical approaches illustrated by various videogames serving as case studies. In doing so, this essay will explore the extent to which freedom can be experienced within videogames, with Ubisoft's stealth game *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) as the main case study. Apart from the philosophical approach using theories by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), and Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984), this essay will provide theories relating freedom found in the field of computer science as well. This essay will hence examine different forms of freedom—narrative, exploratory, and tactical—by analysing how selected games i.e., *Minecraft* (2011), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011),* and *Halo Wars* (2009), exemplify these freedoms compared to the main case study of *Assassin's Creed II*. By exploring the notion of freedom via numerous videogames, exploring both their philosophical and algorithmic contexts, this essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of freedom as it applies to videogames, and the extent to which freedom can be experienced in said videogames.

Figure 1. *Stealth assassination on Venice's rooftops in Assassin's Creed II*: Ubisoft, 2024.

Modes of Freedom

To get a better understanding of 'freedom' and specifically freedom in videogames, the three modes of freedom – narrative, exploratory, and tactical – will be defined first, each accompanied by a fitting videogame. Each of the three videogames chosen to be discussed was released between 2009 and 2011. In using a limited range of release dates, the videogames chosen will prove to be more suitable for comparison to *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), as the industry of game design develops rapidly. Each mode of freedom will be introduced via means of three notable philosophers: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), and Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984). Subsequently, a more contemporary outlook on freedom in its algorithmic nature through theories of, among others, Alexander Galloway (1974) will be discussed in addition to the philosophical approach for each mode of freedom and accompanying videogame. In doing so, a better understanding of freedom, free will, and determinism in both philosophical and algorithmic sense will be established, to thereafter be used in comparison to *Assassin's Creed II*.

Narrative Freedom in *Minecraft*

Narrative freedom entails the ability to tell stories about oneself in the ways one desires. One could argue that narrative freedom through the lens of the external object does not exist due to the internal subject, that is, the player who creates a narrative for the external object via interaction with

the videogame. The chosen videogame to illustrate narrative freedom is *Minecraft* (2011), released by game studio Mojang Studio (2009). *Minecraft* is a popular 'sandbox' videogame, entailing a genre that is used to describe videogames allowing to freely move around through the virtual world, rather than forcing the player to use a linear approach. *Minecraft*'s use, or rather lack, of guiding posts in encouraging the player to complete the main story of *Minecraft*, proves interesting when discussing narrative freedom. *Minecraft*, being a 'sandbox' game, provides its player with a high level of autonomy, contrary to 'progression-style' games in which narrative guides the player to a certain goal, often only allowing the player to move further in the videogame after completion of certain events. *Minecraft* allows its players to both autonomously explore the environment, while also being able to shape and create said environment through creative block-building (Gabbiadini et al. 2017). In *Minecraft*, it could be argued that there is little to no 'right' way to play the game, as the events in which the player is expected or forced to follow a linear sequence of events as intended by the developers of *Minecraft* are rare and serve a purpose of, for example, rolling the end credits. To tie in *Minecraft*'s presumed narrative freedom to theories by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Hegel describes free will to be an experience, rather than an arranged principle. Hegel's perspective of free will is rather paradoxical, whereas Hegel argues that to be free, an individual requires the ability to let go of motivations that form the identity of the individual, while simultaneously expressing themselves via specific motivations that said individual identifies with. This is, according to Hegel, the problem of free will, since it is unclear how both letting go of motivations while actively using motivations in identifying as an individual is possible. Hegel, therefore, described free will to be an experience, needed in order the experience or possess freedom (Yeomans 2012). *Minecraft*, here, offers the player an experience to be shaped to their personal preferences. When applying the notions of the internal subject and external object as theorised by Hegel, the player of *Minecraft* as the internal subject could be able to experience freedom, provided that the external subject – being the creator of *Minecraft* – adheres to the player possessing freedom. In this sense, through philosophical theories on narrative freedom through Hegel, it could be cautiously stated that *Minecraft* offers its players both free will and freedom. In using a 'message-passing' structure for the writing of *Minecraft's* code, *Minecraft* is rather 'easy' to modify for personal use. In 2018, *Minecraft* released some of its codes for public use, granting its players the resources to start experimenting with either creating their own game by using publicised *Minecraft* code or help-

"When applying the notions of the internal subject and external object as theorised by Hegel, the player of Minecraft as the internal subject could be able to experience freedom, provided that the external subject – being the creator of Minecraft – adheres to the player possessing freedom."

ing to improve *Minecraft* its Java engine, as stated by developer Nathan Adams (1991) in an official statement from *Minecraft* (Stone 2018). In doing so, *Minecraft* extended the 'sandbox' aspect of the game to its formal grammar, allowing the player to create a personalised version of *Minecraft* via an open system. The concept of the 'open system' is crucial here and is explored in Alexander Galloway's book *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralisation* (2004). Galloway examines how control and power operate in decentralised networks—systems where multiple local authorities manage the network instead of one central entity—highlighting that protocols governing communication and information exchange in the digital world prioritize control over freedom (Galloway 2004). In addition, in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007), Galloway continues to elaborate on the differences between open and closed systems, in which open systems are generally linked to the public, and closed systems are associated with commercialised or state interest. Here, Galloway furthermore quotes media theorist Geert Lovink (1959) who described the mentioned concepts as freedom, 'hardwired into code'. 'Hardwired' here, means the act of creating a permanent computer feature, which cannot be altered by software. Galloway thereupon poses the question of whether it is freedom if it is hardwired, and unchangeable, suggesting that if anything, this indicates the limitations of freedom (Galloway 2007). With *Minecraft* releasing part of its code to the public, it could be argued that *Minecraft's* system is 'open', meaning that it allows players to alter their experience, thus implying 'freedom' is not hardwired in *Minecraft* and could be experienced if the player would want to. One could even argue that *Minecraft* allows its players to create their narrative, going as far as altering the code *Minecraft* is made of, providing a solid base for a potential experience of freedom.

Exploratory Freedom in *Skyrim*

Exploratory freedom, the freedom to explore at one's own will, offers the player a great deal of movement via the use of the so-called 'open world' concept, contributing to relative autonomy through personalised routes to achieve an objective. The videogame in which exploration is of great importance and that has been chosen for this article, is Bethesda Game Studios' (2001) 'action role-playing' game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011). *Skyrim* (2011), as described by its developers Bethesda, '*reimagines*' and '*revolutionises*' the '*open-world fantasy epic*', that in doing so '*brings to life*' a virtual world that is open for the player to explore in any way they want and desire (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011). *Skyrim*, as stated by Grant Tavinor in his chapter 'Art & Aesthetics' in *The Routledge Companion to Video Game*

Studies (2016), can be considered a "*beautiful, representational artefact*," with the "*naturalism*" accompanied by the rich detailed environment, that together with the exploratory role of the player create an "*aesthetically rewarding*" player experience (Tavinor 2016). The concept of videogames and ludology strongly rely on player interaction to create an experience, the 'beauty' of *Skyrim* combined with the open-world, and non-linear narrative could impact the player their experience of freedom. With the first hour or so being mandatory gameplay, introducing the player to *Skyrim* and prompting the player to create a character and to start the main questline, *Skyrim's* environment is filled with landmarks, waiting to be interacted with. Via both exploration and interaction with said landmarks and communication with non-player characters, the player is encouraged to not only explore *Skyrim* but also actively engage with its environment. By asking for the latest 'gossip' in taverns or inns across *Skyrim*, the player can find out new landmarks to visit, and side-quests to start. The main quest introduced at the beginning of *Skyrim* is hardly mandatory for the full experience of the videogame. An aspect that is hardwired into the code of *Skyrim*, is the reoccurring threat of dragons, a threat the player is objected to 'solving' if they were to follow the main quest, lessening the spawning of the dragons. These dragons attack the player when seen and are often more difficult to defeat than the more common enemies the player is met with. The dragons 'spawn' – i.e. are coded to appear – at both scripted locations as well as randomly generated locations throughout *Skyrim* to attack the player once a certain amount of in-game time has passed; in doing so the randomly spawned dragon attack could happen anywhere if it is outside, and the said amount of time without dragon spawns has passed. For players who do not enjoy fighting the dragons or are focused on a different in-game quest, this could result in a constant state of awareness of the danger caused by the spawning of dragons, when spending time outside. This could be linked to Michel Foucault's (1926 – 1984) notion of control through constant surveillance, or the induced state of awareness achieved via the idea of constant surveillance. Foucault strongly believes in discipline via institutional surveillance or the idea of being always watched. This would then serve as the inducing of a "*permanent state of visibility*' ultimately leading to the '*automatic functioning of power*" among those that are being watched (Foucault 1975). Whereas an individual in *Skyrim* can try to run from said dragons, the player cannot hide. Yet in gaining a sense of control over the constant threat caused by the dragons, the player gains the illusion of freedom by being able to influence said threat, without being free of said threat. With the spawning of the dragons being 'hardwired' into the code

of *Skyrim*, with little possibility of altering said code through gameplay, the player is only able to either follow the main-quest in *Skyrim* or level up their character enough to easily defeat the dragons to lessen the constant threat of spawning dragons and their surveillance. However, the threat cannot be eliminated, and exploratory freedom comes hardwired with the constant surveillance by enemy dragons, awaiting battle with the player, one which they can hardly escape.

Tactical Freedom in *Halo Wars*

The concept of tactical freedom is often related to military practices, and closely ties in with the notion of strategy. Tactics here are the individual steps that allow a strategic plan to work. Whereas strategic decisions are made as an overall plan of action, tactics can change depending on the course of action of said strategy. In 'The Heavy Division Engineer Regiment - A Key to Tactical Freedom of Action', Marc R. Hildenbrand defines tactical freedom to be the ability of a "*combat formation*" to execute a selected course of action, despite "*enemy actions*" to the contrary (Hildenbrand 1991). The videogame in which tactical freedom can be seen is Ensemble Studios' (1994 – 2009) 'real-time strategy' videogame *Halo Wars* (2009). *Halo Wars* is a strategy game: it entails gameplay in which the player's ability in tactical thinking is of great importance in succeeding the videogame's objective. The general theme of *Halo* is to be summarised centring around the threat of human extinction at the hand of The Covenant, which resulted in the 'creation' of protagonist Master Chief through both physical and biological augmentation as the ultimate weapon and 'super soldier' able to save mankind from said extinction. Whereas the details surrounding the creation of Master Chief, who has been abducted as a child to be replaced by a weaker clone to shortly thereafter die, and the ethical debate on freedom relating to war and military purposes, is a topic of debate as is, the main focus here will be the in-game timeline and actual release of *Halo Wars* that could be argued to be pre-determined, hence lacking freedom. *Halo Wars* grants the player control over human soldiers and their military equipment to fight the war in hopes of saving humanity that is otherwise threatened to go extinct at the hand of The Covenant – even though the events portrayed in an earlier videogame from the franchise *Halo: Combat Evolved* (2001) released eight years earlier, already implies the impossibility of preventing humanity from near extinction. One could therefore argue that the player is fighting against a pre-determined loss, which ties in with the notion of determinism. Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), while strongly disbelieving the presence of a god, argues that there is no

ultimate meaning or purpose inherent to human life. If there is no meaning or motive for human life, everything can be considered as being permitted, and it is only pre-determined societal norms and values that create a sense of limitations to freedom and acting upon free will (Odesanmi 2008). It is the individual who can decide to what extent these pre-determined values apply to their actions. When analysing the notion of determinism in a computer science sense, 'deterministic' entails algorithmic processes whose resulting behaviour and output are always the same depending on the input. This means that each input has a pre-determined output, i.e., each player action has a pre-determined outcome that has been hardwired into the underlying code of, in this case, the videogame. To clarify, the deterministic approach entails that if the player were to make decision *x*, its outcome will always be *y*. Contrary to a non-deterministic approach, in which decision *x* could result in *y1*, *y2*, *y3*, etc. Noteworthy is the use of a so-called 'deterministic simulation' used in *Halo Wars*. Each decision and move the player decides upon while playing *Halo Wars*, thus has a set outcome, emphasising the importance of a tactical approach to still achieve the desired goal set through strategy. There are only so many things the player can do to achieve the in-game goal of saving the world from the pre-determined threat of extinction at the hand of The Covenant. When this is analysed via the notions of Galloway's 'protocological' approach and the notion of 'hardwired freedom', *Halo Wars* can be argued to be an algorithm that is unchangeable for the player, yet through the illusion of potentially altering the outcome already determined in an earlier game depicting events that occur later than depicted in *Halo Wars*, the player is granted an illusion of making a difference through personal choice. This, however, cannot be achieved due to the pre-determined nature of both the narrative and tactics of *Halo Wars*, as is embedded and hardwired in its code. It could be argued that the more reliant on strategies and tactics a videogame is, the less freedom the player has or can experience.

Assassin's Creed II

Starting with a brief introduction to Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed II*: the game was released in 2009 as part of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, which started with their first release in 2007. As stated on the Ubisoft franchise page, the *Assassin's Creed* series invites its players to immerse themselves in the memories of the protagonists' ancestors that can be accessed using a device known as the 'Animus', which grants access to said memories stored in DNA. In doing so, the protagonist of *Assassin's Creed* can relive historical events and hidden truths lived by their ancestors. Each *Assassin's Creed*

"Skyrim (2011), as described by its developers Bethesda, 'reimagines' and 'revolutionises' the 'open-world fantasy epic', that in doing so 'brings to life' a virtual world that is open for the player to explore in any way they want and desire" (Bethesda Game Studios 2011).

game typically takes place during an era that holds historical relevance, for example, Paris during The French Revolution, or New York City during The American Revolution. *Assassin's Creed* aims to have the in-game protagonist fight to protect "*free will*" during some of the most "*pivotal*" moments in human history (Ubisoft 2020). The *Assassin's Creed* game series are 'action-adventure games', heavily relying on 'stealth' gameplay. To elaborate, action-adventure games are characterised by elements of exploration, involving intense action sequences including running, jumping, climbing, and fighting. The basic idea behind the mentioned 'stealth' gameplay is the avoidance of confrontation with in-game enemies, rather than seeking it out. *Assassin's Creed II* sold over 1.6 million copies worldwide in the first week of retail, arguably defining the *Assassin's Creed* franchise as known today (Reilly 2009). With *Assassin's Creed II* defining the franchise, the twelve titles that followed heavily relied on the 'social stealth' implemented in *Assassin's Creed II*. *Assassin's Creed II* hence introduced some of the most recognisable features of the game series, and whereas the first *Assassin's Creed* (2007) also allowed the player to engage in stealth-like behaviours, *Assassin's Creed II* revolutionised the franchise by bettering what was, by creating the game around three core gameplay mechanics, that of the 'fight', the 'navigation', and the 'social stealth'. In doing so, *Assassin's Creed II* has implemented game-design loops, actively supporting players in using these core mechanics by providing them with a series of in-game activities and feedback that reinforce the core gameplay mechanics. In doing so, *Assassin's Creed II* aims to keep players engaged in progressive gameplay via means of challenges, rewards, and narrative progression, ultimately aimed at making players feel that their efforts lead to tangible results and personal growth within the game. *Assassin's Creed II* is stated to be the first in the series where the 'multilayered' narrative began to take shape, focusing more on background stories, in-game character development, and in-game rivalries, such as that with The Templar Order (Guesdon 2018). Here, the shared enemy of the *Assassin's Creed* titles grants the protagonist a returning motive, namely that of The Brotherhood of Assassins, i.e. The Creed, whose mission is to prevent the opposing party of The Order of Templar Knights, from their quest of "*world domination*" (Bowden 2009). Where The Brotherhood seeks to promote and protect free will and resist oppression, The Templar Order believes that a structured society built on order and control is necessary for peace. Each game follows this general narrative yet follows a different protagonist through various eras in almost every *Assassin's Creed* game. The chosen videogame in this essay, *Assassin's Creed II,* follows the Italian noble Ezio Auditore da Firenze during the

peak of The Italian Renaissance (1476 – 1499). As described on the Ubisoft store, the game immerses its player in an "*epic*" story of family, "*vengeance*" and "*conspiracy*" during the "*pristine, yet beautiful*" Italian Renaissance (Ubisoft 2010). As Ezio Auditore, born into a wealthy family as the son of the head of the Auditore International Bank, the player is confronted with betrayal early on in the videogame when Auditore's brothers and father are publicly hanged as the result of Templar-induced rivalry. Upon learning about this and the Auditore family's involvement in The Brotherhood of Assassins, Auditore decides to seek out revenge and take on The Templar Order as part of The Brotherhood.

***Assassin's Creed II* Compared**

With an understanding of the general notion presented in *Assassin's Creed II*, each mode of freedom and accompanying videogame will be compared to the extent to which said mode is present in *Assassin's Creed II*. Ultimately, the extent to which freedom is present if not achievable in *Assassin's Creed II* will be explored via comparisons, granting a framework to differentiate the possibility of player-agency and freedom. Starting with the narrative freedom, as explained and illustrated by *Minecraft* (2011). In terms of narrative freedom, *Assassin's Creed II* follows a rather linear approach, meaning that there is a defined 'goal' to be achieved to complete the game. This is contrary to *Minecraft*, in which the 'sandbox' approach and the option to alter the written code of the game itself, *Minecraft* does not end once the 'end' goal is achieved. In *Minecraft*, reaching the so-called 'End' unlocks new in-game features to further the game after the end credits have rolled. In *Assassin's Creed II*, the end credits are the game's end and are used as a way of hinting at a future game where Ezio Auditore's journey continues. Other than the linear narrative in *Assassin's Creed II,* the player can only progress through the game by completing missions in a set sequence and does offer little freedom. The extent to which freedom can be experienced in *Assassin's Creed II* can be argued to be 'better' when analysing the exploratory freedom illustrated through *Skyrim* (2011). In terms of exploratory freedom, *Assassin's Creed II* offers the player a great deal of movement via the use of the so-called 'open world' concept. This entails the player's ability to freely move around within a large virtual environment, contributing to relative autonomy through personalised routes to achieve an objective. Similar to *Skyrim*, *Assassin's Creed II* offers multiple interactive elements spread throughout the map, contributing to either gameplay experience, or part of optional completist quests. Specific to *Assassin's Creed* games is the protagonist's skill in free running, which

is the activity of moving rapidly over or around obstacles within an environment, oftentimes through running, jumping or climbing. The use of dynamic movement to explore the environment has been integral to the *Assassin's Creed* videogames since the first game in the series. Here, the player is encouraged to climb high buildings that serve as 'viewpoints'; for example, the Notre Dame de Paris in *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014) or the Colosseum in *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* (2010), to thereupon 'synchronise' via a button command. In doing so, the game cuts to a scene in which a panoramic 360-degree view of the surrounding area is shown. Afterwards, the in-game map of the area of said viewpoint is updated to show locations of merchants, 'hidden' treasures, and other collectables. Throughout the game, the player is encouraged to 'synchronise' all viewpoints across the area to fully unlock the contents of the map. *Assassin's Creed* plays with the concept of exploration in a rather dynamic way; however, it is directly linked to freedom. A specific example from *Assassin's Creed II* is the restricted areas in which some of the viewpoints are in regions that are coloured red on the map. Even though the areas are accessible, the guards in that area are on high alert, meaning that they will attack the player as soon as they are seen in the restricted area. This makes it significantly more difficult for the player to reach the viewpoint, whereas without eliminating all the guards, there is a possibility of being spotted while climbing said viewpoint and being shot, resulting in the player failing to pursue their climb, and ultimately falling from the said viewpoint. If the player is not yet strong or equipped enough to successfully eliminate the guards guarding the area, it is either a difficult task requiring stealth, or an area that the player must first either free from surveillance before being able to synchronise the viewpoint. As the exploration aspect is tied in with the concept of in-game freedom in terms of liberating said areas, certain viewpoints are not as accessible depending on the player's in-game process. The sequel of *Assassin's Creed II, Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* (2010), took the use of viewpoints in the restricted area a step further. Here, Auditore is on a quest to liberate Rome from Templar oppression, by igniting surveillance towers spread across the map. The towers serve the purpose of viewpoint, as well as ways to monitor the citizens' behaviour, thus practising oppressive behaviours. To climb and synchronise said viewpoint, the player must eliminate the tower's leader first, before destroying the tower and thus lessening Templar surveillance. To relate this to the concept of Foucault, who argues that to ensure the automatic functioning of power, the individual needs to be induced with a state in which they are conscious of always being watched. This notion is also seen in *Skyrim*, yet the sense of being watched is done

by the spawning of dragons, waiting to attack the player. Overall, exploring and freedom in *Assassin's Creed* are almost inextricably linked to each other, yet it is possible for the player, in *Assassin's Creed II*, to bypass almost all said viewpoints and still play the game. Yet the viewpoint at the start of the game serving a tutorial purpose is mandatory, and throughout *Assassin's Creed II*, viewpoints do prove to be a pleasant addition in gameplay where exploration grants the player a more accessible and engaging experience with the open world of *Assassin's Creed II.* When compared to *Skyrim*, the result of explorative behaviour in *Assassin's Creed II* comes faster than in *Skyrim*, where every unlockable location must be visited, rather than seen from great heights as in *Assassin's Creed II.* Yet when comparing both games to Foucault's theories on constant surveillance and the implied obedience it comes with, the sense of impending doom on the player could be argued to negatively impact the experience of freedom in both *Assassin's Creed II* and *Skyrim*. Lastly, there is tactical freedom as illustrated via *Halo Wars* (2009). Whereas *Halo Wars* follows a pre-determined simulation, it is difficult to compare a strategy game to *Assassin's Creed II* due to their inherently differing mechanics. Yet when combined with narrative freedom, it has come to the fore that *Assassin's Creed II* follows a linear storyline, where each mission must be completed to progress through the game. With each mission having a pre-determined outcome upon successful completion, the strategy used to get there can, to a certain extent, be personalised. For example, a mission can encourage the player to travel via rooftops, yet the player can choose to not do so. If the player is, for example, not seen, the player is free to choose their tactics for completing the mission. Far more interesting in terms of tactical freedom is the maxim used by The Creed, namely: "*Nothing is true, everything is permitted*" (Ubisoft 2010). This maxim can be thought of to be strikingly like the notion of Sartre, who argues that if nothing exists except for mankind, everything is permitted and mankind is radically free, yet responsible for their actions. Where Halo Wars only offers so many possibilities in terms of tactics used due to its pre-determined nature, *Assassin's Creed II* could be argued to be 'freer'. Throughout *Assassin's Creed II*, the player can come across optional puzzles to solve, unlocking additional cinematic content upon completion. One notable glyph, however, is presented with the hint stating how nothing is true, and everything is permitted. Here, the player can simply not give a wrong answer in solving the puzzle, whereas quite literally the game permits every solution to be a sequence of button commands. In doing so, part of the tactical freedom is directly visible in *Assassin's Creed II;* no matter

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the tactics, the player will always achieve the strategic end goal, which is solving the glyph, paradoxically pre-determined.

Conclusion

When analysing different modes of freedom through both lenses rooted in philosophy as well as computer science, to thereupon be illustrated using videogames fitting each mode, this essay has explored the extent to which freedom can be experienced in *Assassin's Creed II*. In doing so, it has come to the fore that the extent to which freedom can be experienced greatly differs from game to game, with each offering different degrees of autonomy and freedom, shaped by their hardwired code and narrative design philosophies. *Assassin's Creed II* analysed in this context, uncovers the complex nature of interacting elements in both the game code, as well as when interacting with its player, as it navigates between the coded, pre-determined and linear outcome, as well as the illusion of choice that is embedded and inherent to videogames. Videogames are dependent on player input and interaction hence autonomy is necessary, yet the extent is solely reliant on the meaning or narrative a videogame aims to communicate to its audience. All in all, videogames offer a unique medium for both embracing and challenging the experience of freedom, with each title and accompanying team of developers in charge of player freedom, or rather its illusion.

"*Assassin's Creed* aims to have the in-game protagonist fight to protect '*free will*' during some of the most 'pivotal' moments in human history" (Ubisoft 2020).

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