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ICED: Videogames in the Battle Between the Citizen and the Human

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ICED, which stands for "I Can End Deportation," is a videogame released in 2008 by the human rights organization Breakthrough. The game places the player in the social and legal environments faced by undocumented immigrants in contemporary New York. This article presents *ICED* as a type of popular solution to the challenge of using videogames for meaningful social criticism and analyzes its mode of production as the key source for this popular potential. The creators use design techniques and gaming tactics common in virtual worlds to create a humanitarian game that problematizes the idea of free will. Instead of making free will a tool for progressing in the game, *ICED* uses roaming to create a frustrating game experience. This frustration is an affective lesson about undocumented immigration and the social and legal environment that casts individuals in a world void of freedom and some basic human rights.

ICED, which stands for "I Can End Deportation" and is a play on ICE, the acronym for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, is a videogame released in 2008 by the transnational human rights organization Breakthrough (see http://breakthrough.tv/). The game places the player in the social and legal environments faced by undocumented immigrants in contemporary New York. The player uses an avatar modeled after an undocumented immigrant who has to negotiate life in the city. Immigration officials abound. The player tries to avoid them by following all laws. But the laws are many and quite difficult to negotiate. When laws are broken (such as not paying to use the subway), ICE agents relentlessly pursue the player until s/he is arrested. When this happens, the player is sent to a detention center designed to mimic actual detention centers administered by the ICE.

This article continues a line of investigation regarding the utopianisms often associated with cyberspace in general and, in particular, videogames set in spaces resembling reality such as *Second Life, World of Warcraft, Arden: The World of William Shakespeare*, and *Norrath* (Brookey, 2009; Brookey & Cannon, 2009; Castronova et al., 2009; Castronova, 2001; Gunkel & Gunkel, 2009). Although these worlds offer the opportunity to explore and even challenge identity, social norms, and traditions, most players are not interested in such pursuits, preferring instead to reconstitute traditions and identities in a docile fashion (Brookey, 2009, p. 149). Aware of these criticisms, the article presents *ICED* as a type of popular solution to the challenge of using

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videogames for meaningful social criticism. However, *ICED* does not rely on giving players new freedoms in the hopes these will be used in revolutionary ways. *ICED* becomes a socially promising digital space by critically engaging with the freedoms to which players are accustomed. But this does not happen in a vacuum: *ICED*'s critical edge and popular credentials are the direct result of its mode of production.

Because its goal is to educate, *ICED* is what David Michael and Sande Chen (2006) would call a "serious game." Ian Bogost (2011) uses the term "newsgame" to categorize games that have the goal of disseminating information. Given that *ICED* has the goal of exposing players to truthful information about undocumented immigrants, *ICED* may be also be called a newsgame. Yet, even though *ICED* may be closer to a newsgame than to a virtual world game and its scope is much narrower and different ("serious" or "newsgame") than any of the virtual world games mentioned above, it is similar to these games in that players use avatars to navigate realistic social spaces that they have to negotiate in order to succeed. Even if rudimentary by comparison, *ICED* is clearly inspired by these other virtual worlds and the creators used their knowledge and familiarity with the design techniques and gaming tactics common in virtual worlds to create this very pedagogic and humanitarian game. As relevant to this article, *ICED* uses game dynamics central to virtual world games, in particular a hegemonic notion of free will that *ICED* turns on its head.

By free will, or social agency, I mean the ability users will have to make choices that resemble free choices. Should the user move or stay? Should s/he pick the axle or run? Although users know that these choices are constrained by and constructed through code, they resemble the choices of free agency since the user is responsible for whichever one s/he takes (Barnes, 2000, p. 3). Just like free will and agency are structured by tradition, culture, mores, and law in real life, and, hence, connected to hegemony, the idea of free will in most videogames depends on a desire for mastery and accumulation. Contrariwise, *ICED* uses the expectation of agency, as the exercise of free will, in videogames as a means to critique the legal, political, and security environments surrounding noncitizens. It shows that typical constructions of agency in game dynamics assume that at least some economic, political, and social choices will be always open to the player. That is, the player has a right to be in the virtual world, has a right to choices, and has a right to prosper in it. The player is, in other words, always a citizen.

This article proceeds in two sections. The first section provides details the contexts of the game. Inspired by how rare this type of cultural initiative is, I begin with a brief analysis of the game's production. How was it made? What were the social goals of the game? How did the game fit within the human rights project of this transnational nongovernmental organization (NGO) (Breakthrough is based in India and the United States)? To answer these questions, I carried on in-depth interviews with the designers, researchers, and NGO administrators responsible for the game. My goal was to understand the production of the game as well as the challenges and benefits of using new media to further the goals of human rights. Then, I historicize the moment in which the game was released, a moment characterized by xenophobia and anti-Latino rhetoric. The second section is an analysis of the game with an emphasis on the game dynamics, in which I analyze how these dynamics manifest a critique of common notions of free will and social agency.

UNDERSTANDING BREAKTHROUGH'S POPULAR INITIATIVES

Breakthrough is an unusual organization. It defines itself as an international nonprofit organization that uses "education and popular culture to promote public awareness and dialogue about

human rights and social justice" (Breakthrough.tv, 2003). Breakthrough's use of popular culture is very particular to English linguistic contexts and refers, as John Downing (2013) would help us note, to the diffusion of human rights values in highly accessible ways. Yet the actual cultural practices that characterize Breakthrough are also examples of popular culture in the Latin American, leftist, sense of the term. In this context, the popular is a category of culture with very specific characteristics. Nestor García Canclini (2000, p. 6) proposes that the "popular" should be defined by its position vis-à-vis hegemony. This Gramsci-inspired take on the popular is in reaction to uses of the popular that define it either as that which is folkloric or that which has broad appeal. Neither definition, Garcia Canclini argues, captures the term's capacity to convey the people's desire for expression, publicity, and power. Within this paradigm, popular culture hence is not simply a type of culture characterized by its mode of production, distribution, and success, but it is culture that takes a stand against the established. Clues to the counter-hegemonic standing of any cultural product are often found not only in the meanings embedded in the cultural text but also within its mode of production and distribution. It is this definition of the popular and the analytic threads that the popular implies that I want to use as an analytic tool in this article.

Although the popular has never been a method of analysis per se, decades of using the concept to query cultural texts and practices have made the popular a particular type of heuristic concept. The concept invokes a line of questioning regarding the meanings of cultural artifact sand the valuation of its meaning in relation to the hegemony. It thus calls attention to "a" particular definition of hegemony and the tactical semiotic orientation of the cultural example. The popular is too a type of normative valuation, as we investigate culture through the perspective of the popular with the goal of ascertaining its counter-hegemonic stand or value. In general, the popular is a useful lens for Marxist-oriented cultural research, even though our understandings of the real have made ever more complex the task of defining hegemony. This is particularly true in relation to the human rights of immigrants. On the one hand, many Americans claim to embrace human rights in the abstract (particularly liberal publics). Yet, as Sam McFarland and Melissa Mathews (2005) have shown, when having to choose between national security and human rights, most choose national security (p. 367). But national threats are not the only reason for ambivalence. As many, including myself, have argued, the counter-hegemonic standing of human rights in the United States is the most evident when the issue is expanding some of these rights to the indigent, ethno-racial minorities, noncitizen populations, women, and sexual minorities (Amaya, 2013).

Breakthrough was created in 1999 by Mallika Dutt, a human rights lawyer tired of working in legal and activist circles that seemed to never expand.[1] Concerned about the fact that the values of human rights had ossified, she decided that for human rights to make new inroads in society, they would have to be presented fresh to new populations and decided that the best way to do this was to use mainstream media and cultural forms. Dutt organized the nonprofit with the goal of having a presence both in India, her country of origin, and the United States, where she resides. Breakthrough's first projects harnessed the power of pop musicians in India to compose and sing songs about domestic violence. The result was *Mann ke Manjeeré*, which was released in

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[1]Unless otherwise stated, information was collected through in-depth interviews in April 2009 with the director of Breakthrough Mallika Dutt, game designer Heidi Boisvert, deputy director Mark Sokol, and multimedia strategist Madhuri Mohindar.

2000 with Virgin records, a successful music album that gave Breakthrough visibility and the ability to better fundraise.

While gender issues have continued to be a central piece of Breakthrough's programming in India, Breakthrough has made immigration rights one of their key concerns in the United States. This is partly because the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 happened shortly after Breakthrough was organized. As I have written elsewhere (Amaya, 2013), the aftermath of 9/11 placed noncitizens in the crosshairs of nativist groups in the United States and made mainstream hateful expressions of xenophobia against undocumented immigrants. For most of the decade following 9/11, television and radio personalities such as Lou Dobbs (Lou Dobbs Tonight in CNN), Glenn Beck (Glenn Beck Radio Program—WFLA—and Glenn Beck—CNN and later FOX), and Bill O'Reilly (FOX) constructed their public personas around relentless attacks on and outrageous statements about undocumented immigrants. Their positions ranged from concerns about the negative effect undocumented immigrants had in employment in the United States to baseless claims that terrorists would enter through the southern border with Mexico. From economics to security, the topics used by these and other radio and television personalities channeled populist and racist tactics and normalized the expression of anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiments.

Mainstream media was not the only reason for the mainstreaming of nativism after 9/11. The US government, controlled by the conservative Republican Party, restructured US security institutions and created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with the goal of bringing together more than 20 civilian organizations associated with security under one administrative umbrella. These restructuring fundamentally affected most organizations dealing with immigration. The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) was eliminated and recreated under DHS jurisdiction in the form of three organizations: US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Clearly under the mandated goal of protecting the United States from terrorist attacks, these immigration organizations were led by people (in particular Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff) all too happy to voice their xenophobic views in public and unwilling to recognize their policies as trampling over the human rights of immigrants.

Amidst this xenophobic cultural and institutional environment, many civic, religious, and political organizations, including Breakthrough, understood their role as pushing back against the normalization of xenophobia in mainstream culture and in immigration policy. The game *ICED* is one of the tools that Breakthrough would use to increase awareness of the unjust legal practices surrounding immigration. In particular, *ICED* was a cultural tool aimed at demonstrating that contemporary legal requirements of arrest, detention, trail, and deportation are shockingly incompatible with US legal traditions in other contexts. As legal scholar Daniel Kanstroom (2007) argues, the rights of immigrants, documented or undocumented, are minimal compared to the rights to criminals. He writes:

> Suppression of evidence that may have been seized in violation of the Fourth Amendment will be impossible in most cases. The noncitizen will not be read "Miranda" rights. Indeed, he [*sic*] may not even be advised that he has the right to obtain a lawyer (at his own expense) until after a government agent has interrogated him. He will never have the right to appointed counsel. If he believes he has been singled out due to race, religion, or political opinion, he will generally not be able to raise a 'selective prosecution' defense. He will never have the right to a jury trial. (p. 4)

The list of exceptional legal practices aimed at immigrants continues. As Kanstroom notes, these are not small exceptions. They betray foundational legal understandings of justice in the United States, and this betrayal suggests that the noncitizen must be understood as an exception, in Giorgio Agamben's (2005) sense of the word. Agamben is interested in how a state of emergency allows for the displacement of legal precedent and the centering of exceptionalist law aimed at addressing the emergency with little or no regard for a nation-state's juridical tradition. "In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference" (p. 40). After 9/11, the government, controlled by the xenophobic politics of nativist and ultra-conservative organizations, used the emergency of terrorism to continue or increase the number of unjust practices surrounding noncitizens. These exceptional practices, as *ICED* would remind us, included detention practices where noncitizens are both beyond the reach of US law and the rights associated with citizens, beyond the reach of the noncitizens' own governments and often inaccessible to civic humanitarian organizations (Amaya, 2013).

The mainstreaming of nativism closed off the opportunity for pro-noncitizen voices in mainstream English language media. Although Spanish language media, radio, television, and newspapers often gave opportunity to pro-noncitizen perspectives, the political center of English language media, exemplified here by the success of Dobbs and Beck in CNN, have moved to the right and did not consider pro-noncitizen perspectives within the realm of legitimate debate. Never during the first decade of the new century did English language media give space to pro-noncitizen voices. Instead, it systematically franchised nativism and xenophobia. Given that the mainstream had gone nativist, the work of letting people know the suffering of noncitizens and the unjust practices of immigration and detention espoused by the government was left to Spanish-language and alternative media. Within this context, alternative media organizations like Breakthrough became the lifeblood of the noncitizen political and legal hopes.

VIDEOGAMES AS POPULAR PRACTICES

Practices, as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would suggest, never happen in a vacuum, this is true also for the way games are coded. Practices carry the imprint of history, discourse, and time, and, as practices, become repeated and repeatable; they become doxa within particular contexts and the logical and traditional solution to specific problems. The popular is one such practice, even if the terminology is sometimes ambiguous. The popular pools together a tradition of bottom-up practices and theories that have impacted media and communication studies since the 1970s (Pajnik & Downing, 2008, p. 9). Under the banner of alternative media, social movements, participatory communication, or, sometimes, "nano-media," the popular as practice is found in initiatives to create alternatives to corporate or hegemonic media and, as a testament to the influence of Latin American media scholarship, a recognition that counterhegemonic media practices must be analyzed in terms of process and with the normative understanding that these practices must incorporate, or at least try to, the ideas and experiences of the populations the practices is hoping to help (Cornish & Dunn, 2009; Gumucio-Dragon, 2001; Huesca, 1995). The popular is a heuristic framework not only for researchers like me, but it is also a way of doing things that helps media makers form evaluations critical to their practice. It is a learned way of producing media, and it has constituted a horizon of expectation about process that help practitioners understand

their work and the work of others. The making of the videogame *ICED* shows how these ways of thinking about production have penetrated too the practices of videogame design.

In 2007, Natalia Rodriguez and Heidi Boisvert, two graduate students at Hunter College, took a class centered on community collaboration and digital media (Breakthrough, 2010; Boisvert, personal communication, April 23, 2009). Clearly concerned with an academic approach to the popular, the class gave Rodriguez and Boisvert a fundamental set of tools and sets of expectations into "socially responsible" media. Their final assignment was to work with an actual organization and pitch a project that would bring together class objectives. Rodriguez and Boisvert pitched three projects to Breakthrough and the organization chose the videogame *ICED*. Collaborating with Breakthrough or a similar organization was a necessity, as Rodriguez and Boisvert needed access to the high schools that would become the ground for researching potential gamers. Because by 2007 Breakthrough had a history within New York City of responsible projects involving different types of communities, three high schools quickly agreed to lend their students to the project.[2]

The role of the students was dual. They were approached as potential users of the game and thus they were approached as gamers. This class of interactions was productive, as the designers created focus groups to talk about game dynamics and the social issues of immigration they were hoping to address in the actual videogame. The students also helped beta-testing the game.

Boisvert points out that these students in general tended to be knowledgeable about immigration and, once they were made privy to some of the challenges that noncitizens experienced, they were very excited about lending their personal and gamer experiences to the project.[3] It is through these interactions with teenagers that Boisvert and Rodriguez decided that the most relevant aspect of game dynamics would be the notion of "free will." As the students pointed out to the videogame designers, one of the central aspects of gaming is that winning or success is the result of free movement, which in game dynamics is equivalent to the exercise of free will. Thanks to this insight, Boisvert and Rodriguez decided to use the expectation of free will and free movement and turn it in its head. The goal of the game would thus become to show that noncitizens could not exercise their free will, as they could not make choices that citizens took for granted.

But the students were important to Boisvert and Rodriguez for a second reason. They perceived the students not only as gamers but, at least a subset of them, also as individuals representing the socio-political location that the game attempted to communicate. They were familiar with the landscape of undocumented immigrants—and were part of particular counter-hegemonic popular—that the game designers wanted to model; they were thus valuable collaborators. Boisvert took significant pride in the collaboration with the students, as Boisvert clearly understands that such developing practice gave credibility to the popular (my term) credentials of the game. That is, *ICED* is not only a game that textually has a counterhegemonic stance against state

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[2]The designers Boisvert and Rodriguez had access to the high schools partly because of the credibility of Breakthrough and Hunter College, which assured administrators that the process would be carried through responsible. *ICED* was pitched as a didactic tool, with an emphasis on human rights. Students volunteered, and the proper permissions from parents were given before participation (M. Dutt, personal communication, April 23, 2009).

[3]To have students similarly informed on the issues, Boisvert and Rodriguez gave an introductory lesson on current immigration policies, the relationship these have to human rights, the ways in which these policies, particularly detention, contradict human rights principles (Boisvert, personal communication, April 23, 2009).

practices of the time, but ICED is also partly the product of a mode of production that accounted for the people that the game tried to help. In the interview with Boisvert (Rodriguez had at the time taken a job in Costa Rica and was unavailable for interviews), she highlighted the particular role the Queens high school had in determining the direction of the game. According to census data, Queens is a New York City borough with one of the highest rates of immigrant populations in the area. Almost 50% of the borough's 2.2 million inhabitants were born outside the United States, and the list of nations represented in Queens include, in order of numeric importance, China, Guyana, Ecuador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Korea, Bangladesh, India, and Jamaica. Boisvert referenced this demographic composition in our interview to communicate her understanding of responsible and politically fair videogame design. In fact, Queens was the only geographical high school designation that she volunteered.

Identifying the students with the counterhegemonic position from which the game would levy its criticisms made them important evidence of the popular status of the game design, Boisvert further highlighted this importance by commenting that some of the students became involved in the production of the game. In particular, they provided the voice-over and, Boisvert added, also corrected the language used in it. Even if minimal, Boisvert implies, that some of the student labor ended up in the videogame is evidence, to herself and to others, of socially responsible practice. This is not a small issue as popular communication implies a type of horizontal communication from the people to the people. So, that Boisvert and Rodriguez existed in social locations very different from their target users mattered less because the students had lent the game an imprint of the horizontality idealized in ideas of the popular.

The videogame designers followed other protocols associated with popular communication, including relying on the real to substantiate their political claims. The designing team, for instance, used photographic research to help them document and recreate the streets the avatar roams at the beginning of the game and the detention centers in which s/he invariably ends. They also used interviews with detainees to learn about life within the detention centers, and the actual difficulties and possibilities they encountered.

At each instance, from the designing practices and the way the design was presented to the public, Boisvert (and the rest of the Breakthrough team) showed a high degree of familiarity with the heuristics associated with the popular and the types of evaluative responses these procedures would elicit. As important as the procedures they followed are the textual outcomes. The goal of the game became to show the lack of free will experienced by noncitizens and they used movement and space to convey this. Which leads me to the following proposition implied in the videogame text: free will has a political economy and this political economy is based on the idea of citizenship and movement.

THE GAME

ICED is a downloadable multiplatform videogame. Once in the player's computer, a series of screens prompt the player to select an avatar, a character that is based on real biographies of noncitizens. One can select to play as Anna, a 20-year-old blonde woman, who came to the United States from Poland at age 13, became orphan at 14, and is now trying to be an actress. Or one can select Suki, a 23-year-old computer scientist from Japan who failed to maintain a full course load at Cornell University and lost his student visa. My favorite was Javier, a 20-year-old from

Mexico who came to the United States at 5 years old and, more US American than Mexican, simply stayed. These and the other avatars represent real biographies of people without documents and the differences among them highlight the range of reasons that people end up in the immigration system. Once the player selects one avatar, a new screen displays a text while a deep, male, mechanical, law-and-order kind of voiceover reads the text and introduces the player to the immigration issues that are the context of the game. Next, the player moves to the play area.

Once inside the city environment that is the play area, the player moves with the mouse or arrows, up and down to roam an urban setting, streets with parks, cars, and sidewalks. S/he has a bird's eye view of the geography that helps the player understand where the avatar is and helps her make decisions about movement. The voiceover tells the user what to do, which is basically to stay out of trouble as immigration officers are looking for people like the avatar. The player starts with 100 points and moves her avatar through the environment, trying to stay in the black. If the points are lost, ICE sets in motion a raid and the avatar is always detained. To avoid this, the player moves and collects points through two types of signs. One is a light yellow open hand that signals a good deed and that credits the player with five points. The other is a ligthbulb that asks questions about immigration. These are not easy to answer. For instance: "QUESTION: Myth vs. Fact: Under current US immigration law, a 40-year-old Green Card holder can be deported for stealing school supplies as a teenager." The correct answer is "FACT," and after you click you win five points and read a screen stating: "Very unfortunate but true. Unfair immigration laws make minor offenses like not paying for a bus ticket a felony. Also, the laws apply for mistakes committed in the past. Is it fair that you pay for crime twice?" If you got the question wrong, you lose five points. There is a third set of interactions that prompts a question. When you come to a poorly parked car, for instance, a screen with a question mark comes up: "DITCHED CAR: There is an unlocked car here and you can see the keys in the ignition! Do you steal it? LEAVE IT or TAKE THE CAR." Clearly, you must leave the car or ICE will come after you. Another one says: VOTER REGISTRATION: Walking down the street and you encounter a table where you can register to vote in the next election. Maybe you can make a difference in future immigration policies. Do you sign up? WALK PAST or SIGN UP TO VOTE." You must walk past or be raided. All of these prompts remind us of the ethical path a noncitizen must walk. The prompt that appears in front of a house states: "Look up the window and see a husband beating his wife. Do you report it? WALK AWAY or CALL THE POLICE." Given that any interaction with the police, however civic minded it may be, can result in detention, the player is prompted to walk away from this and other events. Together, they highlight the unsustainable ethics that must be embraced by undocumented people. To "stay out of trouble" includes embracing behaviors that are anti-social yet legal.

If the player stays out of trouble, the game still ends with an immigration raid. Eventually the avatar gets caught at which point the player is given a choice, which will be the only choice from then on: agree to voluntary deportation or go to Louisiana, a detention center where the Anna, Suki, or Javier may be "five months or five years." If the player chooses voluntary deportation, the game ends with a voiceover reconstructing voice and accent of the individual the avatar is meant to represent and a narrative of how they ended up being in detention. If the player chooses detention, the avatar is moved to an environment meant to replicate actual detention centers and the same logic of the game continues: "MYTH OR FACT Immigrants who have been detained always have access to a court appointed lawyer." The answer is "MYTH," an answer that is followed by "Right now, 84% of all detained immigrants have NO lawyers. Some don't even get

the chance to appear before a judge." The questions and actions the detainee is asked to negotiate all point to the exceptional law that undocumented detainees experience, from lack of access to lawyers, the impossibility of knowing when due process will happen, the random length of detention, and the substandard care that they receive in most detention centers.

At each instance, *ICED* places the gamer in situations where exercising her/his free will, here signified by movement and the answers one gives to the prompts, may result in the end of the game. In this, *ICED* is similar to most games that use avatars and have set narratives and resolutions such as first-person shooter games (*Call of Duty*), maze games (*Pac-Man*), and most adventure games (*Grand Theft Auto*). What is specific to the game is that whichever path one takes, whichever choices one makes, like in *Pac-Man*, the results are the same. The player's avatar ends up in detention and is eventually deported. Unlike typical videogames that use avatars and have finite narratives, free will is not the tool one uses to learn how to succeed in a specific quest nor the ticket to mastery. No amount of roaming or practicing will allow a player to win the game. Everybody looses. Everybody is deported. In *ICED*, free will sets in motion a tragic narrative, one that can never be resolved positively regardless of whether one plays the game one hundred times and learns, like what is common in most games, all the right moves and answers to all the questions and prompts.

My point is not simply to note that free will has tragic connotations in this videogame. Rather, I am arguing that this particular signification of free will was the result of a political economy that structures cultural practices in real life and that the game reflects or at least refracts in the digitized world of *ICED*. In this, *ICED* is like other games set in virtual worlds, games that use gaming dynamics to replicate the types of actions and decisions a person may have in their non-digital life. It is partly these gaming dynamics that allow complex economies in *Second Life* or *Arden* to develop. In those games, like in capitalism or mercantilism (Arden is set in the transition from mercantilism to capitalism in England), free will is signified, coded, and rewarded by assuming a political economy based on self-interest (Castronova et al., 2009, p. 166). Not every player acts the same way, but a significant portion do, to reconstitute a hegemonic notion of free will that is teleological, that has the goal of accumulating wealth, resources, powers, and/or experiences. The personal tactics gamers must use to reach this goal of accumulation are always docile to self-interest and to the a priori understanding that qualities, properties, and powers can be accumulated to excel in the game. Game dynamics, thus, naturalize self-interest and make it the key logic that players must use to be in the game.

In most videogames and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs), like the ones referenced above, players start with only a small portion of "play options and abilities that they will have at the end of the game. A newly created player character starts with the most rudimentary abilities and will later gain additional advancements through the exploring the world and accomplishing various tasks" (Castronova et al., 2009, p. 167). Yet the process of acquisition depends on the a priori understanding among players and game designers that characters can, indeed, acquire and accumulate, and, as importantly, players will want to acquire and accumulate. To accomplish this, players may cooperate, give, trade, cheat, and lie if this is done in the spirit of self-interest. This notion of free will is not the outgrowth or reflection of the gamer's actions and previous experiences, but it is also the result of the way the game is coded, the manner in which rewards and punishments are established and knowledge shared among gamers. That is, self-interest and this notion of free will are the result of code, game design, game dynamics, and gaming communities. Lastly, a free will rooted on self-interest is not simply an ancillary feature of these

MMOGs and virtual world games: Self-interest is the engine moving forward the games. It is this hegemonic idea of a self-interested free will that makes predictable the way in which choices will be made and thus programmable. This free will is essential to the game dynamics that build the "worldliness" of *Arden* or *Second Life*, their economies, their social-like character, and their politics.

By contrast, *ICED* presents a popular and counter-hegemonic notion of free will that makes transparent that, whatever illusions the player has about free will, using a hegemonic notion of videogame free will in this game is useless. If in most games, a player uses roaming, trials, and community information to master space, objects, and interactions to succeed in the game, *ICED* precludes the players from using any of these common game tactics to achieve such mastery. Instead, the player ends up always in detention and at risk of deportation. The game is rigged: the player always looses. The notion, or expectation, of free will thus becomes a constraining and frustrating one.

This aspect of the game design makes it popular in the sense that I have articulated above in that it positions *ICED* players against the norm, inviting them to reevaluate their assumptions about game design and the real worlds that games represent. These games, including the virtual worlds of *Arden, Second Life*, and such, are structured around political and legal assumptions of membership that resemble the membership relation between citizen and state. In these videogames and MMOGs, a player's avatar has a right to be in the virtual world; it has a right to choices; and it has a right to survive and prosper. The avatar is thus assumed to be a citizen and, I argue, game dynamics in such games tend to be a byproduct of this assumption. The pleasures of survival, success, accumulation, and mastery cannot be dissociated from the citizenship assumption. By contrast, *ICED* presents us with avatars that do not belong, for whom mastery means little and no reward will make their belonging lasting. These avatars, we can call them Javier, Anna, or Suki, are always going away, vanishing, in the process of being deported.

ICED's popular credentials do not end there. For, prior to the coding was a mode of production that had popular elements. In fact, using free will in this counter-intuitive way was partly inspired by Rodriguez's and Boisvert's interactions with students and potential users, so that the game was constructed in response to immigrant students ideas and with the hope of building a horizontal relationship between players and the undocumented immigrants used as models for the avatars. In addition, the relationship between the makers of the game and the students, which was curated by their respective high schools, was furnished by the not-for-profit human rights credentials of Breakthrough and the fact that Boisvert and Rodriguez were affiliated to a prestigious university and graduate program. This mode of production, unusual as it may be, was essential to the set of creative and technological possibilities and hence constitutive of *ICED's* popular and counterhegemonic notion of free will.

CONCLUSION

Compared with the significant number of people using virtual world games and MMOGs, *ICED*, which was used by roughly 250,000 people, is a small videogame with a very specific goal: to educate young people about the challenges facing undocumented individuals in the United States and, through the game's design, to give players an opportunity to reflect on their assumptions about free will and agency. Both goals are interlinked, as the challenges facing individuals are

represented through the real biographies that serve as the avatars' background and the game's lessons can only be completed by playing, using the avatars, and experiencing the frustration of having no options but to be detained and deported. At its best, the game offers an opportunity for horizontally connecting with Javier, Anna, or Suki. This horizontality is the productive side of tragedy.

The tragedy of noncitizens, in the digital mini-world of *ICED* as in real life, is that they continuously face quite complex regulatory systems that tell them to stay out of trouble, but not in the way a citizen would. To the noncitizen, staying out of trouble means disengaging and deactivating fundamental ethical processes that would compel any individual, independent of their citizenship status, to help those in need, to participate in political process that could improve everybody's life, or to serve the nation regardless of lack of citizenship. That tragedy of noncitizens is that free will is a source of frustration and danger and they are better off shutting down that crucial aspect of life dynamics.

Breakthrough is an organization set on popularizing the goals and values of human rights and on using popular culture to help remedy concrete social problems. Yet there is something contradictory about the framing of immigration issues from the perspective of human rights. The term "human" suggests a utopian idea of global belonging in which rights are imbued in our very identities as humans and thus are transferable and transportable; however, the problems experienced by noncitizens and the remedies that can be glimpsed in the game ICED all point toward expanding citizen rights to noncitizens. For instance, the problem of detainees not having access to lawyers is remedied by giving detainees access to lawyers, thus mimicking the right of legal council that citizens enjoy. This style of remedy is found constantly in the game. The standard for social agency and freedom *is* the citizen. This is a conceptual and game design limitation. Instead of pointing towards a truly utopian sense of humanity, *ICED* reconstitutes the notion that it is the citizen who should serve as the model for justice and freedom. In so doing, *ICED* naturalizes the nation-state and the legal partitions that define the world-system as the proper map for comprehending the human, foreclosing any utopian possibility. In *ICED*, there is no such thing as human rights. In the battle between the human and the citizen, it is the citizen that in its overreaching power covers and makes invisible the human.

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