7

Advergames

Electronic Arts (EA) canceled all its plans for product placement in *The Sims 2* after its failed experiments in *The Sims Online*. Julie Shumaker, EA's director of ad sales at the time of the release of *The Sims 2*, explained their rationale: "We realized breaking the Sims fantasy in this case would detract from the player's experience, so we declined."[1] EA's decision serves as a gut-check for dynamic in-game advertisers who claim that ads always add realism to games, or that realism is always desirable. Even if advertisers manage to develop an ability to craft procedural rhetorics that represent their clients' products and services, commercial publishers may not have any interest in hosting them in their games.

What's more, commercial game genres offer limited opportunities for the wide range of products and services on the market. With *The Sims* off the ad market, few other popular, commercial games depict everyday household situations—the only sensible context for consumer-oriented packaged goods, which constitute a great deal of consumer advertising messages. Transferable contexts like that of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* may not always be possible or appropriate. Videogame publishers and consumers likely will not tolerate a glut of placements in commercial games. With the cost of developing AAA console titles predicted to double on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, even seven-figure ad placements won't necessarily offset development costs enough to justify them. And although proceduralized products in commercial games represent an interesting application of advertising in videogames, the field is currently a limited one for both advertisers and developers.

An alternative presents itself: if a videogame appropriate to host a particular product or service doesn't exist, a company could create a new one, an advergame. Unfortunately, since the original ⟨kpe⟩ report in 2001, the term has been unfairly applied only to associative Web games like *Mountain Dew Skateboarding* and *Ms. Match*. But I understand *advergame* to refer to any game created specifically to host a procedural rhetoric about the claims of a product or service. More succinctly put, advergames are simulations of products and services.

Despite their apparent novelty, advergames have a long history. Text-based mainframe *Star Trek* games were popular in the 1970s, although the games were unauthorized and are probably better characterized as the computational equivalent of fan fiction.[2] The first film-to-game adaptation was 1976's *Death Race*, a controversial arcade game based on the 1975 film of the same name (figure 7.1).[3] But the earliest game I have found with authorized branding in support of a product is the 1976 arcade game *Datsun 280 Zzzap*, a pseudo-3D driving game of the same style as Atari's more popular *Night Driver* (figure 7.2).[4] Calling *Datsun 280 Zzzap* an advergame might be a stretch, since nothing about the game's mechanics was necessarily tied to the vehicle. The

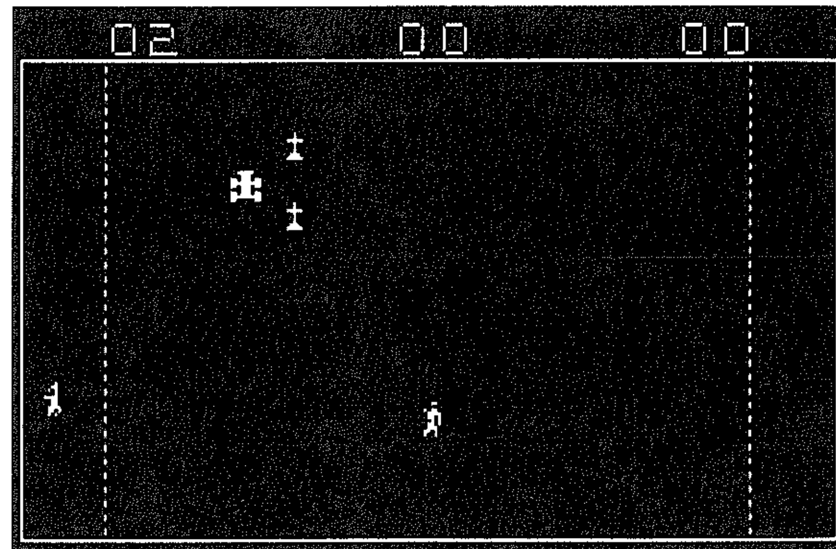

Figure 7.1 Inspired by the film *Death Race 2000, Death Race* may be the first videogame based on a film.

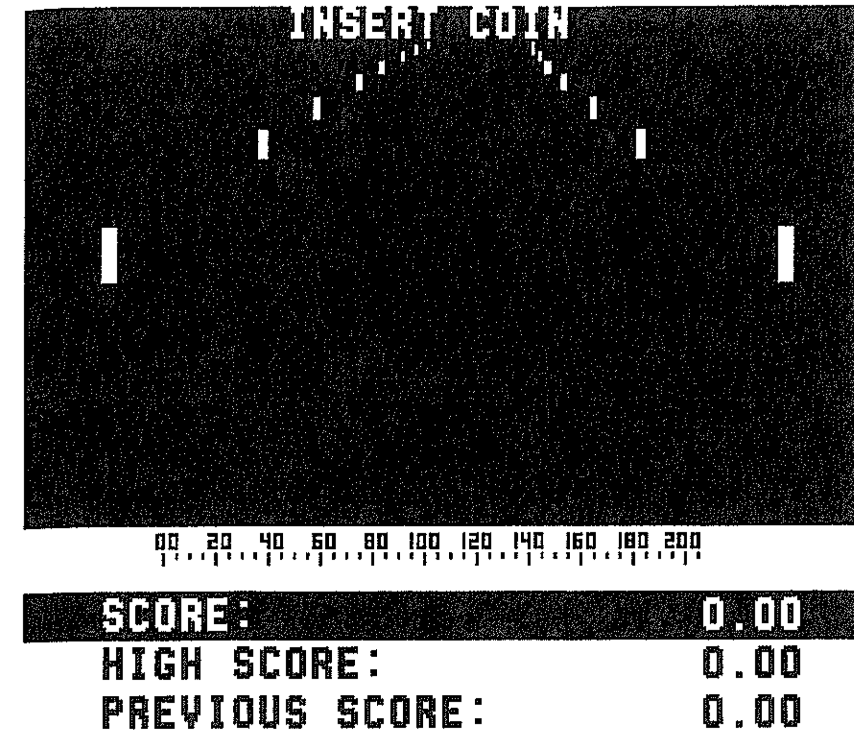

Figure 7.2 Even though the vehicle itself never appears in the game, *Datsun 280 Zzzap* is the first videogame with an advertising sponsor.

cabinet's marquee depicted a Datsun 280Z, although another, less common version was also released sans branding, called *Midnight Racer*.

By the early 1980s, brands took greater interest in creating games crafted more explicitly around their products. In 1983, consumer packaged goods company Johnson & Johnson released a game for Atari 2600, *Tooth Protectors*.[5] The game depicts a row of teeth at the bottom of the screen, with a player character (the Tooth Protector, or just T. P.) just above it. A ghoulish "snack attacker" drops small pellets, which the player must deflect (figure 7.3). Hitting the snack attacker awards bonus points and a new, more skilled attacker takes his place. Failing to block the pellets will cause the struck teeth to flash (indicating decay) and eventually disappear. The player can restore flashing teeth by pressing the joystick button, which issues a full-regimen tooth cleaning, including brushing, flossing, and mouthwash.

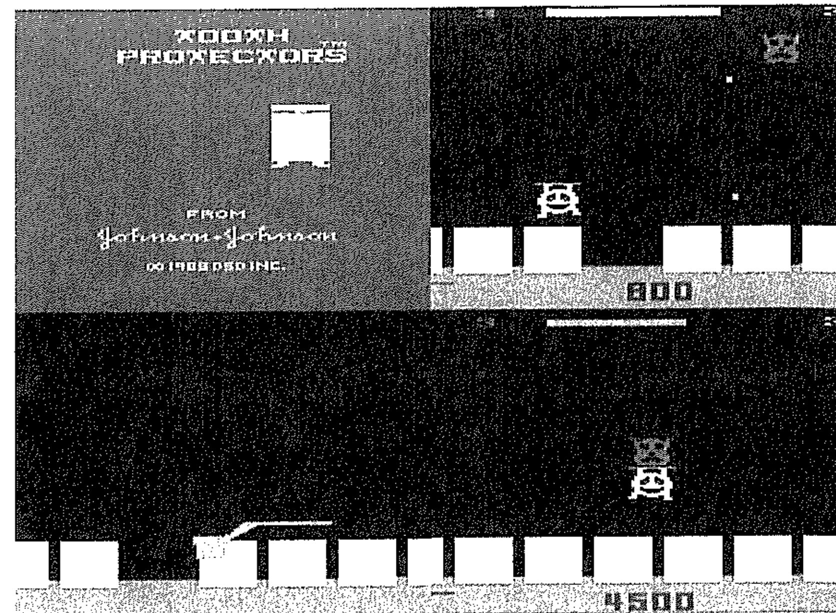

Figure 7.3 Johnson & Johnson's mail-order Atari VCS game *Tooth Protectors* offers a logical rather than a moralistic rationale for dental hygiene.

Given the constraints of the platform, the game is quite sophisticated. Rather than controlling the toothbrush, floss, and mouth rinse—the products Johnson & Johnson actually manufactures and sells—the game gives the player control over the oral hygiene situation itself. The procedural rhetoric is simple, but effective: it represents a causal relationship between eating and oral hygiene. The snack pellets represent undesirable foods; the player gets points for deflecting them (the game equivalent of refusing to eat them). Inevitably, some snacks get past the tooth protector. Snacking isn't the end of the world, but after three collisions between snack pellets and a single tooth, the tooth begins to decay. The player has a limited number of tooth cleanings, but must use them to save decayed teeth. Additional cleanings are awarded at point thresholds, the game's equivalent of extra lives.

Tooth Protectors is a game about the responsibility of oral hygiene. The game's rules enforce a causal relationship between snacking and tooth decay, and the points structure rewards the player for forgoing sugary snacks. However, the rules also admit the reality of snacking not as failure but as

human nature. Just as the player cannot possibly deflect every pellet, the child cannot possibly defer every snack. In some cases, the player will inadvertently deflect a pellet at an odd angle that will actually cause it to strike a neighboring tooth. This procedural representation of the temptation of treats is a rather sophisticated adaptation of the Atari 2600's hardware constraints. The cleanings themselves also enforce a procedural rhetoric of duration: the tooth-cleaning animation is actually quite time-consuming in the context of a videogame, running approximately fifteen seconds in duration. The player cannot skip this interlude, just as the child should not cut short toothbrushing sessions.

What Johnson & Johnson accomplishes with *Tooth Protectors* is to prompt the player—in this era probably a child—to consider dental care as a logical system rather than a moralistic one. Like toilet training and looking both ways before crossing the street, dental hygiene is typically imposed on children as an issue of righteousness: if you do it you are a good kid, and if you don't you are a bad kid. *Tooth Protectors* disrupts this opaque and doctrinal relationship and replaces it with a rationalistic one, expressed via the game's procedural rhetoric.

Admittedly, the game could be attached to any manufacturer, although the manual explains that T. P. deflects snack pellets with an outstretched dental floss (a detail the Atari's graphics leave up to our imagination), a signature Johnson & Johnson product. And the game's manual depicts product images of Johnson & Johnson brand dental hygiene products, including Reach toothbrush, Johnson & Johnson dental floss, and Act fluoride rinse. But most importantly, *Tooth Protectors* was only available via direct mail order from Johnson & Johnson; it was necessary to collect UPC symbols from their products and to mail them in to get the game at all.[6] Here, promise of a videogame serves as the advertising and direct purchase incentive, which the game then converts from top-down, adult manipulation into a legitimate, eye-to-eye conversation with the child, on his own terms—a home videogame system.

Ralston-Purina attempted the same mail-order strategy with *Chase the Chuck Wagon*, also created for the Atari 2600 in the same year. Unfortunately, the game is rather forgettable, neither entertaining nor of particular interest as an early example of videogame advertisement. The player controls a dog, which he must pilot through a maze to reach the familiar Purina chuck wagon logo, while avoiding a dogcatcher and weird, anonymous objects bouncing around the playfield (figure 7.4). The game has more in common with *Coca*

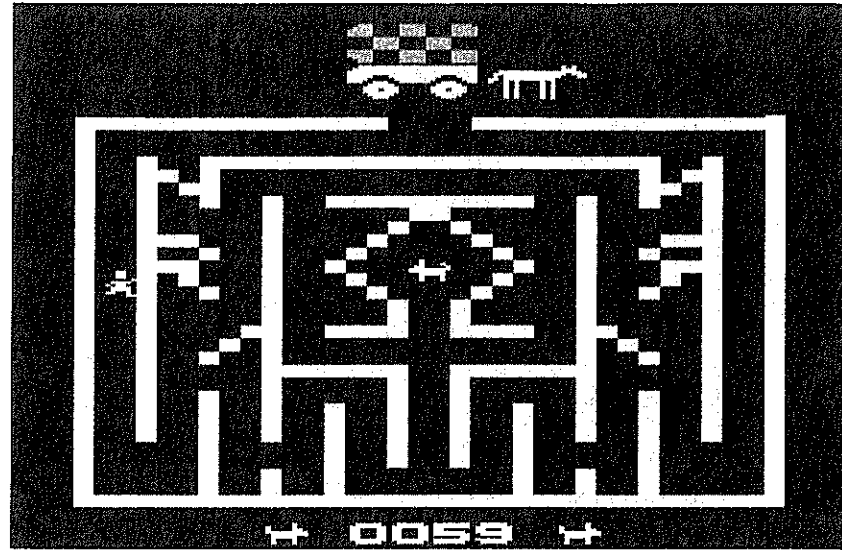

Figure 7.4 Purina's *Chase the Chuck Wagon*, a precursor of the associative advergames found on corporate websites today.

Cola Kid than with *Tooth Protectors*—it was probably an attempt to recruit kids to urge their parents to buy Purina brand dog food so as to get the videogame, missing the interesting social advertising message of *Tooth Protectors*.

Since both *Tooth Protectors* and *Chase the Chuck Wagon* were not sold at retail, they are quite rare and sought after by collectors. *Chase* is the more common title, but it is also the more highly desirable one.[7] Although it is not named in the book, some claim that *Chase* is the obscure title searched for by the protagonist of D. B. Weiss's 2003 novel *Lucky Wander Boy*.[8] Their rarity speaks to the limited adoption of both games. *Chase the Chuck Wagon* in particular makes an instructive point about the dangers of brand-sponsored advergames: the novelty of having a videogame can take the place of using the medium's unique properties for advertising purposes.

No matter the quality, developing an Atari 2600 game is not easy. The hardware was arcane and documentation was closely held; third-party developers reverse-engineered the device in order to figure out how to program it. Whereas most modern online advergames are written in high-level languages, Atari 2600 games were written in assembly. Cartridges had to be manufactured and distributed by mail or in retail (where shelf space is always limited).

But since the mid-1990s, Macromedia Flash and Shockwave have made simple game development easy. The World Wide Web has made distribution easy. And a whole lot of advergames have been created by advertising and interactive agencies.

Many of these, like the games at Postopia or Kewlbox, deploy illustrative or associative advertising. But others have taken a different approach, using videogames to simulate experiences with products or services and in so doing create opportunities for consumers to interrogate those products as potential needs and wants.

In mid-2005, knife, scissor, and gardening tool company Fiskars released an advergame and promotion called *Fiskars Prune to Win*.[9] The premise is simple: the player must trim a continuously growing summer backyard to keep it from going wild. To do so, he must properly use four Fiskars tools: a pruning "stik," hedge shears, a snip, and a pruner. Different tools must be used on different plants; hedge shears are for hedges, not trees. The pruner is for bushes, not for flowers. The game's controls are simple and perhaps overly repetitive, but nevertheless effective in hammering home the proper tools for specific gardening actions.

Fiskars would like consumers to purchase all four products, which are "clearly" required for any self-respecting home gardener. But the game makes this case much differently than would a print ad or television spot; the player controls each of the tools repetitively in sequence, first gaining an understanding of the game's procedural rhetoric, namely Fiskars' claim that each tool is necessary for some type of yardwork. In the initial stages of the game, the player concentrates on learning the mapping of tool to plant type. After this process, the player may begin to map the yard represented in the game onto his own yard. What are the similarities? Do I even have any rose bushes to worry about? Are those tall bushes on my side or the neighbors'? When the player leaves the game, he understands Fiskars' position—we make specialized gardening tools, here they are—as well as his own—some yardwork I concern myself with, some I don't. The game is a means of reconciliation between the brand's claim that all the tools are needed (a claim the game's scoring system strictly enforces), and the likelihood that a real customer will choose one or two of the most applicable tools given a set of options.

By contrast, consider the approach to consumer choice among multiple products deployed in GlaxoSmithKline's *Sensodyne Food Fear Challenge*.[10] Sensodyne is a toothpaste made for people with sensitive teeth. The Food Fear

Challenge is a real-world event that gives those with jaw pain a chance to participate in eating contests with trigger foods, to consult with an on-site dental professional and to take part in other carnival-like activities. The game's theme is boxing, and the player defends a tooth against one of three opponents, Killer Cup of Joe, Ice Cream Kelly, and The Citrus Squeeze. The game forces the player to choose one of eight Sensodyne varieties as his "defense," but the screen seems to be there just as an excuse to list product features—the products are not simulated to perform differently in the actual game.

Tooth Protectors and *Fiskars Prune to Win* offer general consumer awareness that could easily be applied to other brand-name products. It is here that other factors, such as Fiskars' reputation for quality products, needs to take over to influence a purchase decision. For the purpose of understanding the potential of an advergame, a closed-loop purchase decision is immaterial. Rather, what is important is the game's success in creating an open space in which the player might consider the seller's product claims in a simulated, embodied experience. Compare the Fiskars game to a promotional webgame for the DVD release of Academy Award–nominated documentary *Super Size Me.*[11] The game, dubbed *Burger Man*, is a straight clone of the arcade classic *Pac-Man.*[12] The hero has been changed to an admittedly endearing squashed and pixilated version of director Morgan Spurlock. The ghosts have been changed to portly Ronald McDonalds, the dots to burgers, and the power pills to carrots. The gameplay is identical to that of *Pac-Man*; the player must clear the board, avoiding Ronald or using the carrots for a temporary power inversion.

Burger Man stands in stark contrast to the film it promotes. *Super Size Me* is a penetrating and personal interrogation of the short- and long-term effects of a fast-food diet. In the filmmaker's words, the documentary "explores the horror of school lunch programs, declining health and physical education classes, food addictions and the extreme measures people take to lose weight and regain their health."[13] As a promotional tool, the web-based game could have represented this social and political space, asking the player to make rudimentary dietary and lifestyle decisions and seeing the traps of public programs, poverty, or even the health effects of massive fast-food consumption, just as Spurlock takes on in the film. Such a game would have introduced the player to the procedural rhetoric explored in the film, namely that fast food is an integral part of the obesity problem in contemporary America. As executed, *Burger Man* simply provides evidence that the producers can

successfully make (or more likely, hire out) a videogame of reasonably high production value.

In at least one circumstance, high production value alone *can* serve as demonstrative advertising. Before the dotcom bubble burst in 2000, interactive agencies frequently created showcase pieces to tout their abilities, usually in the form of web- or email-distributed holiday cards. Once the economy picked up again, this practice resumed, and in December 2005 longstanding interactive agency Agency.com created *Agency.com Snowball Fight.*[14] The game playfully satirized interactive agencies' own relationship with their clients; the player could choose from agency and client characters, each rendered as an appropriate cartoon caricature. Players then competed in a snowball fight with the opposite team, set in stylistic, snow-covered backdrops of cities with Agency.com offices. *Snowball Fight* is a meta-advergame; the services it makes claims about are Agency.com's own ability to create advergames and, by extension, other rich-media web-delivered services. The player, most frequently a current, former, or potential client of the agency, would play the game as a kind of litmus test for using the studio for future work.

But perhaps the most sophisticated procedural rhetoric in a web-based advergame comes in one that does not even use the familiar Flash or Shockwave technologies, let alone more sophisticated 3D browser plugins. Weary late-night office workers, searching for reprieve, might occasionally find themselves staring blankly at their computer screens. Such was the case for *Ready Made* magazine editor-in-chief Shoshana Berger. Burned out on deadlines and dealing with an overdue office construction project, she was fed up and looking for a break. Staring at the blank Google home page in front of her, she absentmindedly typed in the word "escape," then clicked "I'm Feeling Lucky."

The result was a cryptic, abstract game with one-line instructions: "Click and drag the red block, avoiding the blue block as long as you can." The game is implemented in Javascript; the player moves a red block around until one of the moving blue blocks strikes it, at which time a dialogue box reports the number of seconds the player endured (figure 7.5). A hyperlink below the game sends the player to Mountain Bike Ireland, the apparent sponsor or host of the game.[15]

Similar to Janet Murray's claim that the classic puzzle game *Tetris* is "perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans in the 1990s—of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order

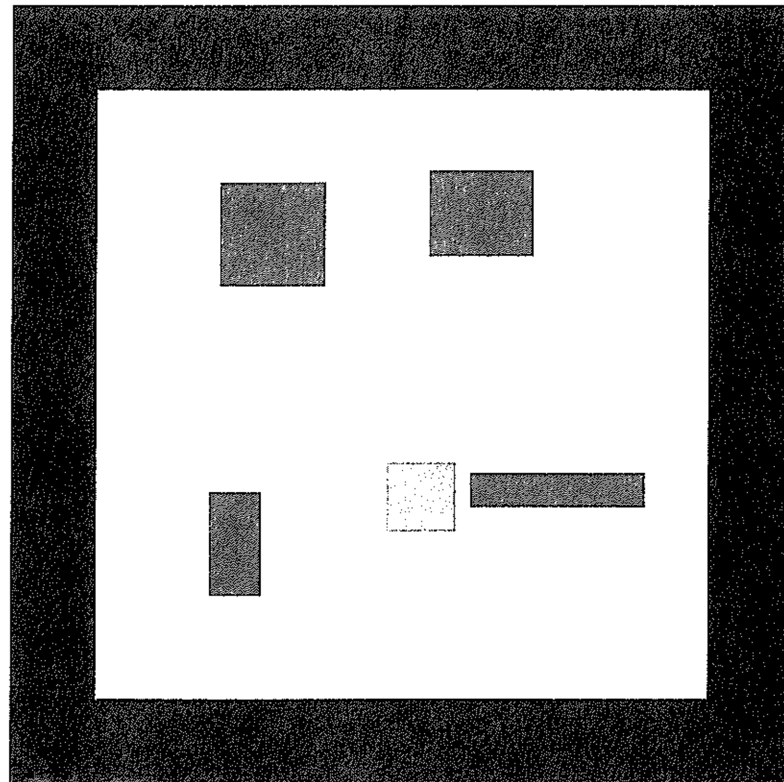

Figure 7.5 Playing the abstract web-based Escape game enacts the frenzy for which the sponsor offers respite.

to make room for the next onslaught," the Escape game operationalizes the sensations its services seek to countermand.[16] And not only does game proceduralize the anxiety of office work, but the only way to find the game is literally to be driven to it, to *search for "escape."* A conventional advergame about mountain bike weekend trips to get away from civilization might put you in

the saddle, riding through terrain. It would be another extreme sports game, another associative advertisement. But this game does better: it makes the player aware of the quotidian tribulations that would cause such a need in the first place, and then uses search-engine optimization to get the game into the hands of people likely to be suffering from those tribulations. The game not only musters a procedural rhetoric of burdensome coercion, but it actually turns that rhetoric inside out, encasing the game inside the very experience that reveals it.

The same procedural system was far less persuasive when reimplemented by McDonald's in the curious advergame *Shark Bait*.[17] Created before Lent to "remind players of the year-round availability of the Filet-O-Fish sandwich," *Shark Bait* reskins the escape game with swimming sharks and a Filet-O-Fish sandwich.[18] The player must keep the sandwich away from the sharks as long as possible. The rules are the same, but the context has changed radically, and the videogame no longer simulates a process even remotely applicable to the product advertised.

While many small advergames are constrained by budget and expertise to web delivery and therefore to the technologies that play in-browser, some companies have had the wherewithal to sponsor much larger custom-built games. These games often deploy much more sophisticated procedural rhetorics than their web-based counterparts, not because the latter are inherently less capable, but because the former are (necessarily) created by professional game developers rather than advertising agencies. In one notable example, automaker Volvo collaborated with Microsoft to create *Volvo Drive for Life*, a game that allows players to drive three Volvo vehicles on a simulation of the company's Göthenberg proving grounds course, both with and without safety features enabled.[19] Volvo reportedly produced 100,000 copies of the game, which runs on the Xbox home console;[20] the company has distributed the games for free, at auto shows and in dealer showrooms.

Volvo faces particular difficulties in its chosen approach to the automobile market. The company is principally known for its safety features, but those features can never be demonstrated in a test drive. The company has shown crash-test footage and told harrowing life-saving stories about its vehicles, but all of these tactics use verbal or visual rhetorics. They cite previous accounts and attempt to make credible generalizations based on emotionally gripping, and sometimes manipulative, tales.[21]

Volvo Drive for Life takes a different tack. By simulating the safety features and then removing them from the experience, players can approximate the actual correlation Volvo claims between its mechanical innovations and actual improved safety. The physical accuracy of the simulation is not of primary consequence here; the game is not intended to provide a literal representation of the vehicles' actual responses under every situation. Rather, the game offers a subjective space for the player (and prospective Volvo buyer) to occupy inquisitively. *Volvo Drive for Life* deploys a procedural rhetoric about mechanical consequence, arguing that features like roll stability and front-end collision dampening provide materially demonstrable safeguards.

Given an embodied experience of Volvo's claims about the mechanism of its vehicles, the game then releases the player onto representations of three real-world courses, the Pacific Coast Highway, the Italian Grand Prix, and the road to the ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi, Sweden. This portion of the game includes traffic and other obstacles, giving the player a second point of reference: traffic safety. The Göthenberg track showcases the vehicle's role in safety, while the three highways showcase the driver's role. Unlike games such as *Gran Turismo* where the goal is to race to the finish first, or games such as *Burnout* where the goal is to crash and create as much carnage as possible, in *Volvo Drive for Life* the goal is to traverse the mundane reality of automobile transit.

The procedural representation of the car's capabilities intersects the player's own attention, reflexes, and driving habits. Volvo argues that the mechanical safety devices are tied to the driver's use or abuse of the vehicle; the best way to stay safe is to avoid accidents in the first place. This is a familiar maxim, perhaps even a clichéd one. But note the difference between the verbal argument—"the best way to walk away from an accident is never to get into one"—and the procedural argument—the individual experience of the intersection of human control and mechanical vehicle systems. Whereas the verbal argument verges on the moralistic, offering little meaningful insight into particular risks, the procedural argument allows the proclivities of an individual driver to resonate against the mechanical features that might offset those tendencies. As an advertisement, *Volvo Drive for Life* offers a much more measured statement about the real relationship between safety, equipment, and personal responsibility.

Not all automobile features are related to driving. Many advertisers tempt buyers with performance or luxury features, but more mundane, practical features like storage and seating weigh first on many buyers' minds, especially

families. Television ads often idealize these features, showing families effortlessly hurling movable seats about, or watching furniture magically arrange itself in the back of a waiting vehicle, as if a wizard comes standard. These commercials are usually intended as illustrative or associative advertisements; they document a feature or correlate a lifestyle, with the intention of driving the consumer to the next step in the purchasing process, in the case of automobiles a request for a brochure or a trip to the dealer. Advertisers sometimes call this strategy "hand-raising."

But such strategies risk forestalling the actual relationship between human needs and product features, replacing them with a simulated relationship, that of the *perception* of needs. This perception often takes the place of consumer contemplation. Judith Williamson has related this perception of needs to the production of a gap in ads: "we are invited to insert ourselves into this 'cut-out' space; and thus reenact our entry into the Symbolic."[22] By the Symbolic, Williamson refers to the entry into language that psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan claims to be an endemic part of the formation of the subject. Advertisements give the illusion of freedom, but then implicate their viewers in foregone conclusions. Williamson argues that ads dupe their viewers into entering this space and filling in the "cut-out" area, rushing into that absence as a vacuum draws air from high to low pressure.[23] In these advertising situations, the perception of need is interchangeable with the considered custody of need. Interestingly, Williamson's gap bears striking resemblance to the rhetorical figure of the enthymeme, the syllogism that omits one of its premises. The difference Williamson articulates is similar to J. Anthony Blair's objection to visual arguments: the advertising does not enter into dialectical conversation with the viewer. Rather, it manipulates the viewer to supply the missing premise without knowing he is taking part in an argument.

In many cases, advertising itself does not shy away from this allegation. "Aspirational" advertising, a branch of associative advertising, relies on consumers' knowing acknowledgment that products and services do not speak to their needs, but to the things they wish were needs. The Nike *Rock Shox* game discussed earlier relies on this strategy: if the player were a world-class athlete, then minor adjustments in equipment could make a real difference. The *SSX 3* Honda placement relies on this logic as well: simply *wanting* to have a snowboarder lifestyle is reason enough to buy an Element. In the manufacturer's mind, the buyer need not ever evaluate or question these sensations before purchase.

But advergames also have the potential to collapse the vacuum of perceived needs. Consider the so-called "Stow 'n Go" feature DaimlerChrysler has recently built into its Chrysler and Dodge minivans. Stow 'n Go is a seating solution that allows the owner to fold second- and third-row seats completely into the floor, rather than removing and storing them in a garage for large cargo excursions. When the seats are deployed in the normal upright position, the compartments into which they would otherwise stow can secure other items, such as groceries or cargo. Stow 'n Go is a perfect example of a feature for which both traditional advertising and dealer test-drives fall short. The television spots invoke the wizard, miraculously arranging vehicles and lives in thirty seconds' time. The dealer visit offers only an abstract experience of the feature, divorced from any actual scenario.

In 2005, Daimler commissioned a game created by Wild Tangent to address this challenge. *Dodge Stow 'n Go Challenge* was well conceived in principle: use a videogame to simulate the Stow 'n Go seating in a more meaningful way.[24] The game presents a detailed three-dimensional mall scene, asking the player to select among one of several stores (interestingly, one of these is a fully branded Bed Bath & Beyond store, an example of in-advergame advertising, a rather perverse incest to be sure). The player chooses a product appropriate for the selected store, which the game then transforms into an abstract geometric shape. The player is required to fit this shape *Tetris*-style into a grid superimposed inside a top-down view of a minivan.

Unfortunately, the specter of associative advertising haunts the game. The creators were apparently overcome by the realization that the traditional minivan buyer also falls into the same "soccer-mom" demographic as a large segment of the casual game-playing market. Thus, an opportunity to concretize the function of the product was abandoned in favor of a meta-associative advertisement that simply put the minivan in front of that potential buyer. In fact, the game may not even have made it that far, given its minimum system requirements, which included a 3D accelerated video card, DirectX 8.1, and 128MB RAM.[25] More offensive, the game presents shopping as the only context for Stow 'n Go. Kids' soccer games, family picnics, swap-meets, and moving junior into a state college dorm are framed out of the minivan lifestyle. Apparently storage always means storage for newly acquired goods.

Compare *Stow 'n Go Challenge* with a similar game, this one commissioned by DaimlerChrysler's Jeep group and designed and developed by my studio.

Jeep introduced a new truck, the Commander, its first to include third-row seating. While the vehicle does not sport Stow 'n Go, it does offer the same overall advertising pitch: you need three reconfigurable rows of seats to cart around your family and your equipment. The game we created, *Xtreme Errands*, tried to make good on the claim that reconfigurable seats add functional, not just perceived value.[26] It is a strategy game, borrowing conventions from turn-based unit management war games like *Advance Wars*.[27] Each level has a theme, and each turn the player can move family members, move the Jeep Commander or reconfigure its seats, and pick up and drop off cargo (figure 7.6).

Whereas *Stow 'n Go Challenge* deploys the procedural configuration of abstract space as a way to represent Stow 'n Go seating, *Xtreme Errands* operationalizes limited time and resources, a problem common to both military commanders and busy families. Although DaimlerChrysler required that the levels support "Jeep lifestyle" activities like skiing and camping, those activities are never actually displayed in the game; in fact, the game's flippant title undermines the very notion of lifestyle activities. Instead, players drop off dry cleaning, cart around kids, pick up groceries, and deliver an entire soccer team on game day. The game challenges the player to complete these assignments in as few moves and turns as possible, but the player is not constrained to do

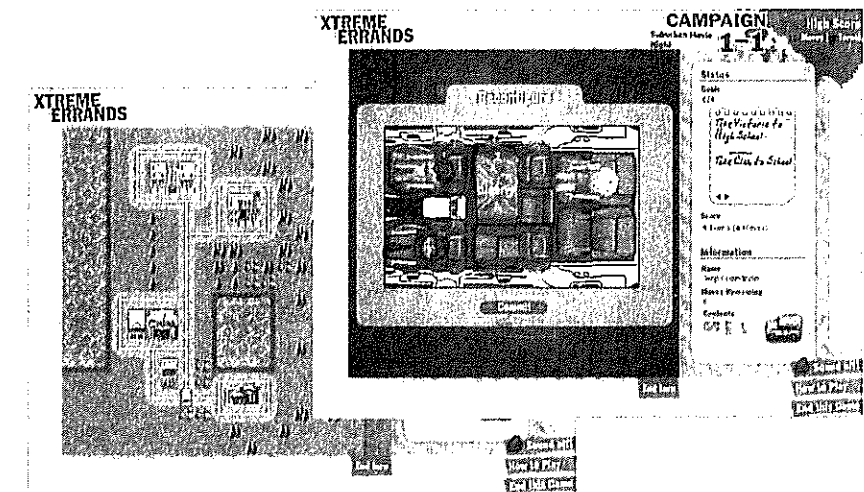

Figure 7.6 *Xtreme Errands* offers a procedural representation of how an SUV with third-row seating might help families accomplish everyday tasks.

so; the real goal is to experiment with a concrete representation of the vehicle's cargo and passenger space.

The procedural rhetoric of *Xtreme Errands* suggests that the Commander's affordances for flexible seating and storage couple usefully with certain family routines. The game is a sandbox for potential buyers to test that claim and reflect on its applicability in their lives. If we think of the advertisement as leaving a "cut-out" space as Williamson suggests, rather than being sucked into this space, the advertisement acknowledges it and welcomes the player's rejection, acceptance, or further interpretation of it. This time, the space between the game's rules and the player's subjectivity is a procedural enthymeme, or what I have called a simulation gap. Engagement with this gap creates a situation of crisis, a simulation fever.[28] Advergames that acknowledge this condition represent significant social progress in advertising: playing the game challenges the potential consumer to experiment with the ways he might use a product if he owned it.

Soft Drinks and Beer

To further illustrate the transition from illustrative and associative to demonstrative advertising in videogames, I want to look at the evolution of a particular market segment that has funded and produced games for at least twenty-five years: the beverage industry.

Beverages are a unique and noisy industry. According to the American Beverage Association, nonalcoholic beverages alone account for almost $100 billion in annual sales.[29] Dozens of brands compete for the right to hydrate and, more ambiguously, "to refresh." Unlike many consumer products, hard and soft drinks offer very limited product-to-product differentiation. The differences between Coke and Pepsi cola, Dasani or Aquafina water, Vernors and Canada Dry ginger ale, are difficult to demonstrate empirically. Seemingly, the only way to distinguish one soft drink from another is by personal preference. Personal preference cannot be determined, but it can be influenced. Beverage manufacturers have thus traditionally relied on associative and illustrative advertising as their primary strategies.

Given the enormity of this market segment, it is not surprising that a soft drink sponsored one of the first home-console advergames. In 1983, General Foods created *Kool-Aid Man*, a videogame for the Atari 2600 and Mattel Intellivision home-console systems.[30] While the game could be purchased at retail,

as in the case of *Tooth Protectors* and *Chase the Chuck Wagon* consumers could also obtain the game via mail order. According to a flyer, Kool-Aid customers needed to send in 125 Kool-Aid proof-of-purchase points, or 30 proof-of-purchase points and $10.[31]

Jonestown massacre aside, Kool-Aid was and remains primarily a kid's drink.[32] General Foods has used numerous popular-culture strategies to try to get kids to convince their parents to buy Kool-Aid, including a comic book, *The Adventures of Kool-Aid Man*, which ran six issues from 1983 to 1989. Thanks to the success of Kool-Aid Man as a transmedial phenomenon, General Foods attempted to leverage any and all media that might help cross-promote the character and therefore the product. The Atari version took up an ongoing theme portrayed in the advertisements, comic-book, and television commercials in which Kool-Aid Man battled evil "Thirsties," spikey gremlin-like creatures with insatiable thirst. In the game, the player helps Kool-Aid Man thwart the Thirsties' attempt to steal water out of a swimming pool while collecting Kool-Aid ingredients—"S" for sugar, "W" for water, and "K" for Kool-Aid—to stop the Thirsties' incessant attack on an otherwise idyllic summer backyard scene (see figure 7.7). The Intellivision version was somewhat different; in it, the player searches a house to locate the necessary equipment to make more Kool-Aid (pitcher, mix, sugar) while avoiding the

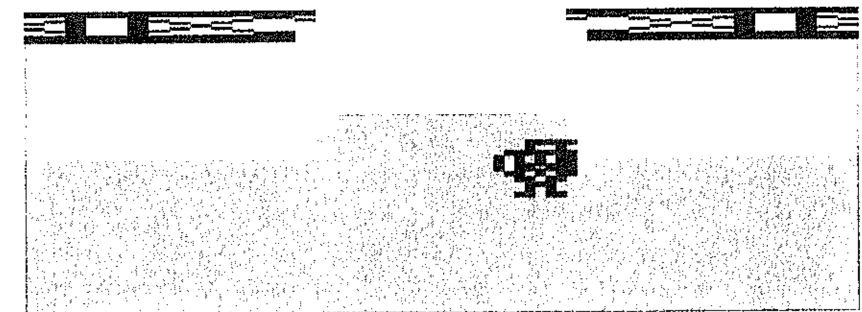

Figure 7.7 *Kool-Aid Man* for Atari VCS is among the earliest advergames.

Thirsties. Once the player makes a batch of Kool-Aid, the roles invert and he can chase and devour the Thirsties *Pac-Man*-style.[33]

The advertising strategy was principally an extortionist one. One hundred and twenty-five packets of Kool-Aid is enough to make 62.5 gallons of the drink. Quaffing enough to send in for the game demanded several months of continuous Kool-Aid consumption, a task that became more difficult as time passed, parental support for the venture being inversely proportional to the amount of sugar drink consumed. As with *Dodge Stow 'n Go Challenge* and *Kotex Ms. Match*, the videogame served primarily as a way to illustrate the product to a particular demographic.

However, one demonstrative message does emerge from the game: the preparation method for Kool-Aid itself. There is a kind of magic to Kool-Aid; its inventor Edwin Perkins was inspired by his own childhood fascination with the powdered dessert Jell-O. Perkins developed Kool-Aid as a Jell-O-inspired solution to the problem of shipping glass bottles of concentrated drink mix. Despite its simplicity, Kool-Aid remains a mystery to young kids. Somehow, that small packet of pale powder turns into a whole pitcher of sweet, bright red punch. Both Atari and Intellivision versions of *Kool-Aid Man* feature instructions, albeit extremely crude ones, about the actual preparation of the drink. Like unpacking the strategic operation of theme parks with *SeaWorld Adventure Parks Tycoon*, *Kool-Aid Man* exposes the operation of preparing Kool-Aid, including an admission that it is near equal parts sugar and water. While this fact alone isn't going to change dietary habits, it does open the door to discussions about the role of sugar in contemporary packaged foods. Perhaps after learning how to mix Kool-Aid via *Kool-Aid Man*, a child might be interested in learning how much sugar he consumed while collecting those 125 proofs-of-purchase—65 pounds when prepared according to the on-package instructions, or roughly the average weight of an eight-year-old. Here the videogame has the potential both to support and question the advertiser's business.

Soft drink companies continue to use games as tools to penetrate the youth market, as evidenced by *Mountain Dew Skateboarding*, discussed in chapter 5. In addition to their branded game consoles, Coca-Cola in particular has commissioned numerous web-based advergames in support of its larger promotional plans. Consider the company's ongoing holiday-themed ad campaigns, with their computer graphics penguins, polar bears, and Santa Clauses all enjoying Coke as an integral part of their holiday regimens. In one example of a

videogame extension of this campaign, interactive agency Perfect Fools created *Nordic Christmas*, a sophisticated set of web-based games with very high production value.[34] The games were based on the 2004 season's elf-themed advertising, in which elves drank Coke as a kind of tonic for their playful, sometimes mischievous holiday pursuits. The games revolved around a tournament, with castle climbing, fencing, lancing, and catapulting activities.

Coca-Cola is nowhere to be found in any of the games, save gripped in the little hands of the elf characters depicted on the game's menu screen. Advertisements like these appear to be associative; as in the Volkswagen New Beetle print ad, Coca-Cola is associated with holiday playfulness and fun. But interestingly, the associative features Coca-Cola wants to leverage correspond precisely to the functional features of leisure videogames. Coke is about "enjoyment" and "fun"—exactly the sensations videogames are thought to produce.[35] Thus, we could think of generic advergames like *Nordic Christmas* as procedural manifestations of the enjoyment that the product produces, or more properly that it facilitates. Like alcohol, Coca-Cola presents itself as a social lubricant that produces enjoyment rather than uninhibitedness. Television and print ads in this vein create empathetic pleasure—the sensation of understanding the joy of the young boy or the polar bear as they quaff a Coke. Advergames like *Nordic Christmas*, though, are legitimately entertaining, albeit unrelated to the sugar-water Coke otherwise sells. The advertising has become the product, providing the actual enjoyment suggested by the product's demonstrative claims.

This inversion can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, we could understand *Nordic Christmas* and other games like it as affirmations of Baudrillard's procession of simulacra; the product has been replaced by the advertising, which now services the consumer instead of the product. On the other hand, we could view such games as markers of the dissonance between the product and the advertising claims made in support of the product. When we watch the polar bear commercials, the bears give us an impression of enjoyment; they slide down snow banks or glide across frozen lakes. But when we play the games, we experience *actual* enjoyment, with no Coca-Cola required. This dissonance founds a simulation gap, wherein the player can interrogate the ongoing claims Coca-Cola makes about its products, and his or her own willingness or unwillingness to accept them.

Missing from the Coke games is any representation of "refreshment," the other value common in Coca-Cola advertising. Aside from deploying the

archetype power-up technique we witnessed in *Mountain Dew Snowbaording*, one can imagine a game in which thirst and refreshment might actually be core to the gameplay. Coke's failure to attempt such a game may suggest a lack of specificity in its claims to "refresh"—ignoring the idea that rejuvenation may come in different forms at different times. The player might recognize that Coca-Cola does not actually produce specific types of invigoration, but only one: the kind that involves the purchase of its products. In fact, Coca-Cola's strategy has shifted from winning new customers to increasing purchases by existing ones. Coke products (including Dasani water, Minute Maid juice, and the company's other non-soda brands) now account for 10 percent of the world's total liquid intake (TLI), a figure they hope to increase.[36]

An advergame that does take on such a demonstrative challenge is *Pickwick Afternoon*, created as part of a Dutch campaign promoting a new flavor of tea from the well-known Pickwick company.[37] Pickwick Afternoon Spirit is an herbal tea blend of peppermint, chamomile, and licorice root. The tea was offered as an afternoon pick-me-up suitable for stirring a diminished body and mind, but without the caffeine necessitated by an afternoon black tea or coffee. The game is about as simple as a small web-based game can be: three young people on a couch doze off repeatedly as their afternoons catch up with them. The player controls a teapot with which he pours tea to refresh each of them. The gameplay is essentially Whack-a-Mole played with boiling hot tea.

As a game, Coca-Cola's *Nordic Christmas* is clearly more sophisticated, sporting much richer, more refined gameplay. But I would argue that as an advergame, *Pickwick Afternoon Spirit* is more sophisticated, offering a game-based experience of the product that actually communicates something about it. Many marketers would disagree with me, citing evidence for developing and maintaining brand value. But attaching the Coke brand to a high-quality game with no meaningful message is bad for advertising and bad for games. Games that work to build experiences around products have the potential to become both good games and good advertising, without subordinating either medium to the other.

The same year General Foods put pixilated Kool-Aid pitchers on home consoles, Bally/Midway released the arcade game *Tapper*, in which the player helps a frantic bartender serve demanding and increasingly irate bar patrons.[38] The game was unique in every respect, but its main draw was a beer-tap interface in place of the usual digital button. The tap feels authentic, but its operation is abstract: the player pushes it forward to fill a beer, then pulls it

backward to serve the beer, which slides down the counter into the waiting hands of a thirsty customer. If no customer is there to retrieve it, the beer breaks against the back wall of the tavern, costing the player a life. The game portrays four bar-styles in as many levels: country-western tavern, sporting event bar, punk club, and space alien bar.

The original version of the game featured prominent Budweiser branding on the wall of the bar (figure 7.8), on the draught mugs, and on cans during an interlude bonus game. Like *Yoshinoya* and *CoCo Ichibanya*, *Tapper* puts the player in the role of the server, not the consumer of the product. But this game pits the player against his customers, patrons whose drunken fervor erases any semblance of empathy. The customers are parodies of the drunken bar-hopper—the folly of their inebriation is rendered procedurally as a thoughtless, almost zombie-like progression toward the tap.

As an advertisement for beer, the game is a curious one. The player becomes the lone sober character, faced with the constant onslaught of drunken halfwits. Like *Kool-Aid Man*, the game could be read as an associative

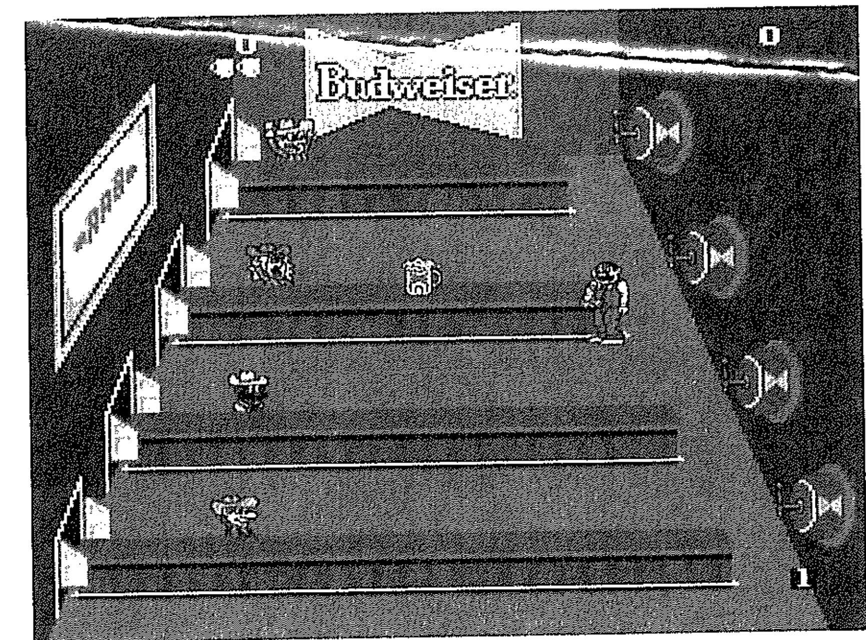

Figure 7.8 *Tapper* showcases early in-game advertisements, in this case a Budweiser beer backdrop.

advertisement. *Pong* started out in bars, after all, and young adults playing in bars and lounges dominated the arcade game scene of the 1970s.[39] Budweiser would have as much reason to brand a videogame in such a location as a coaster, or a lamp over a billiard table. But the game could also be read as a demonstrative advertisement; after all, the one product feature afforded by beer is inebriation, which the game crudely proceduralizes via customer ire. There is more than a hint of irony in a bar service game, for play in a bar, about servicing drunken patrons, presumably played by actual drunken patrons (both of the bar and the game). Budweiser, the bar proprietor that hosts the game, and Bally/Midway all cash in on the joke.

How does the player experience *Tapper*? By stepping outside of himself and performing the repetitive actions of the bartender, the player is forced to confront the reality of Budweiser's industry: inebriation impairs judgment, which is why it serves as a social lubricant. But such impaired faculties also contribute to the sometimes-unintended incremental support of that industry—the drunk get drunker, as it were. *Tapper* defamiliarizes the process of consumption, both through its procedural representation and through the distortion of the bartender the player controls. This defamiliarization opens a simulation gap that invites interrogation of the player's alcohol-consumption practices themselves. Budweiser's endorsement of this concern is a much less visible social service than adding *please drink responsibly* in small print on their ads, but perhaps it is a much more meaningful one. Some might object that drunken bar patrons are not capable of such self-reflection, but failure to control *Tapper*'s virtual bartender due to player inebriation might very well alert the player to his own diminishing faculties, a gross-motor signal no less effective than stumbling on the way to the toilet or falling off a barstool.

Another advergame takes such drunken stumbling as its primary gameplay mechanic. U.K. beverage maker Britvic manufactures a soft drink called J_2O. Some cultural context is probably necessary to explain it fully; until late 2005, British pubs were required to close their doors at 11:00 PM. Those interested in drinking later would have to move on to clubs, and a common venue for later night drinking is the dance hall. Dancing becomes more difficult once inebriated, so serious night crawlers are advised to pace themselves. Water makes a fine salve for increasingly sizzled clubbers, of course, but Britvic hoped to capture some of the free-flowing pounds sterling of such occasions. J_2O is a beverage that bills itself as a "perfect soft drink pacer." According to Britvic, the product allows you to drink more, for longer, while

enjoying any of five flavors of this "adult fruit drink."[40] Not to be outdone by those wishing for alcoholic refreshment, Britvic also notes that J_2O makes a fine mixer.

In 2003, U.K. agency Graphico created an advergame to support J_2O. *The Toilet Training Game* puts the player takes the role of a tipsy clubber who needs to relieve himself.[41] As the game starts, the player sees a toilet bowl flanked by the player character's trainers.[42] The primary game mechanic is urination; the goal is to aim in the center of the toilet and avoid oversplash. After each successful bladder emptying, the player character downs another pint. After more rounds of drinks, accurate aiming becomes harder, and the player inevitably splashes outside the bowl (figure 7.9). The player must then drink a J_2O, which relieves some of the inebriation and restores his ability to urinate and, by extension, to party accurately.

This is a sophisticated videogame. The urination mechanic itself is remarkable; the game implements a strange attractor that draws and repels the player's cursor target in an increasingly haphazard fashion. The lack of control

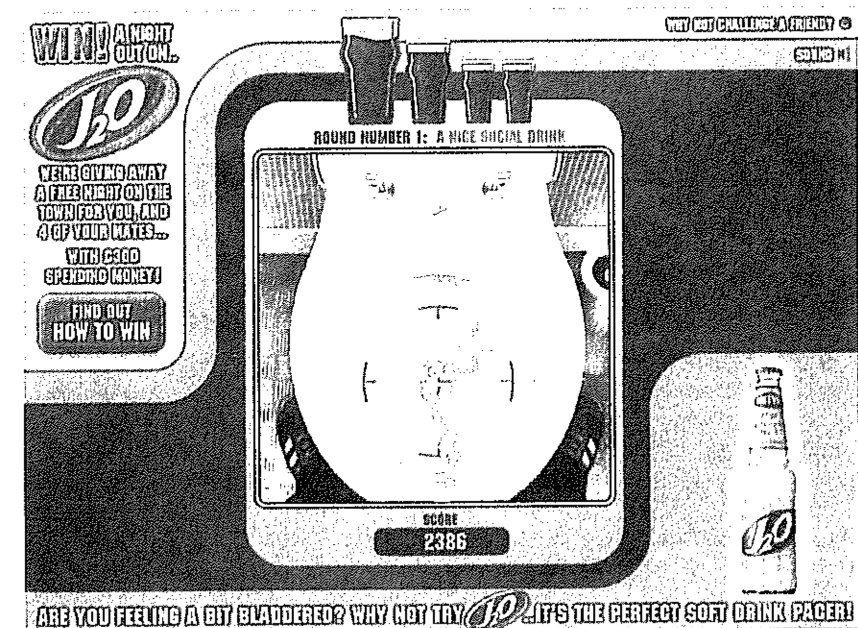

Figure 7.9 *The J_2O Toilet Training Game* effectively simulates the product claims of Britvic's "pacer drink."

is palpable, a superb unit operation for the physical and psychic incapacity of intoxication. But even more so, *The Toilet Training Game* serves as an excellent example of demonstrative advergaming. Concentrating *Tapper*'s simulation of drunkenness, *The Toilet Training Game* focuses on one, unique experience, that of relieving oneself. J_2O's salient product feature—relieving drunkenness—is tied to an activity apparently unrelated to dancing, socializing, or beguiling members of the opposite sex. But no matter the late-night activity, relieving oneself remains common to them all. Furthermore, the force of biology often draws clubbers and partygoers away from the noise and ruckus of the dance floor or the bar. It is only there, in the quiet of the loo, that a full recognition of the depths of one's inebriation sets in. Like *Tapper's* re-creation of the hypothetical drunkard, *The Toilet Training Game* enacts the moment in the player's simulated evening when he doubts the wisdom of the lifestyle that has landed him there, stumbling against the doors of the toilet stall. The game may approach the logical opposite of associative advertising—advertising that dissociates a product from a desired lifestyle. J_2O is not just about tempering an evening's overindulgence; it is about tempering the very lifestyle of alcoholic overindulgence.

Britvic's decision to represent this pivotal moment in the nightclub experience is paradigmatic for the positive role advergames can play in consumer culture. By casting their product's tangible benefits in a procedural representation of a situation of great reservation, the advertisement challenges the player to interrogate the degree to which he really needs the mixers, the pints, and indeed the very J_2O that the product advertises. Advergames function best at the intersection of demonstrative advertising and embodied experience through procedural representations of products and services. These games create simulation gaps about consumption practices; they expose the potential unities *and* discontinuities of consumer goods as they enter the lives of *individual* consumers. Unlike ideological apparatuses which, in Judith Williamson's words, "offer you a unity with the sign, a unity which can only be imaginary," advergames like these muster an uncertain subjective space that do not necessarily violate individual identity.[43]

In their relevant book *Age of Propaganda*, Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson investigate a compliance tactic called *the pique technique*.[44] The two argue that simply piquing someone's interest may be enough to elicit compliance. In their experiment, a panhandler who asked for 17 or 37 cents collected 60 percent more donations than a panhandler who asked for a quarter.

The pique condition forced people to focus on the request, rather than screening it out as noise. Currently advertisers use piques solely to draw players' attention toward the very short-term messages they carefully craft to influence wants and needs. Pratkanis and Aronson argue that persuasion as conversation—the type used in the rhetoric of the ancient Greeks—hoped to "create discourse that could illuminate the issue at hand."[45] They contrast this type of persuasion with modern media, which appeal to emotions and send information foils that prevent us from separating the wheat of a problem from the chaff.[46] Videogames are not a miracle cure to this problem. But they do offer a start that may be incisive, by deploying more sophisticated persuasive speech designed to create rather than avoid uncertainty about products and services.

Anti-Advergames

As media images have increased, so have critiques of advertising. In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein argues for resistance to the brands that view the world as one large marketing opportunity.[47] Juliet Schor has critiqued the immersion of children in particular in consumer culture.[48] Alissa Quart extends such critique into the teenage years.[49] Quart discusses videogames in particular, including *Super Monkey Ball 2* and numerous other examples of product placement; Quart argues that these games overpower the impressionable minds of young people, giving them the false impression that a branded world is natural and even desirable. In her critique of branded products like shirts and skateboards in *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3*, Quart argues that older skaters resist the commercial images while younger ones worry about donning the right brand images and dream of corporate sponsorship.[50]

Some groups have tried to take matters into their own hands and rally against the profusion of commercialization in games in particular. Some of these speak against the colonization of videogames by advertisers; others actively advertise against specific products and services, singling out companies by name. To capture both of these senses, I suggest the term *anti-advergame*.[51] For one part, anti-advergames advertise against a company; if advergames are endorsed and paid for by a corporation and are produced to support its business, anti-advergames are not endorsed or paid for by a corporation and are produced to critique its business practices. For another part, anti-advergames work against the practice of advertising in games itself; if

advergames allow brands and products entrance into commercial videogames, anti-advergames critique or disrupt the insertion of such ads.

As an example of the latter type, critic Tony Walsh offered a set of ad-busting strategies for vegetarians, eco-activists, and other disgruntled users of *The Sims Online* McDonald's kiosks:

- Picket the nearest McDonald's kiosk. Stand in front of the kiosk and tell visitors why you think McDonald's sucks. Be careful not to use foul language or hinder the movement of your fellow Simians. Polite protest can't result in your account getting suspended . . . can it?
- Actually order and consume virtual McD's food, then use The Sims Online's "expressive gestures" in creative ways. Lie down and play dead. Emote the vomiting, sickness, or fatigue that might overcome you after eating a real life McNugget.
- Open your own McDonald's kiosk. Verbally abuse all customers in the name of McDonald's. Loudly proclaim how terrible your food is and how it's made from sub-standard ingredients (or whatever you think will turn people off). Make sure you preface each such statement with "In my opinion," to avoid libel charges.
- Open an independent restaurant. Gain the confidence of your clientele, and then let them know your business is being hurt by ubiquitous McDonald's kiosks. Ask them to put pressure on other Simians to support small business people instead of cogs in a gigantic franchise-machine.[52]

Walsh encourages players to use the McDonald's features to subvert their intended message. In a similar vein, shortly after in-game ad network Massive began placing their ads in commercial games, a group of makeshift hacktivists ran their Massive-enabled version of *SWAT4* through a packet dumper. After finding the Internet endpoints for the Massive service, they promptly published instructions for disabling the system on a local PC.[53]

There.com, a multiuser virtual world, was originally conceived as a digital extension for brand companies.[54] As in many persistent virtual worlds, users exchange real currency for virtual currency ("therebucks"), which they can spend in-world to customize their avatar or environment. Early versions of *There* touted the planned inclusion of virtual versions of Levi's jeans and Nike shoes; in addition to advertising, the brands hoped to use the virtual world as a kind of virtual focus group for new real-world products.[55] Virtual world critic Betsy Book has argued that original brands developed in-world by *There* community members and used to market services available only in the virtual

environment have been far more successful—both in the commercial and social senses.[56]

Walsh's anticorporate activism in *The Sims Online*, the hacktivists who disabled Massive, and the *There* users who built rather than consumed brands offer useful suggestions for actively opposing the profusion of advertising in videogames, but they focus specifically on advertising *in videogames*, not the relationship between advertising and the material world. And while the grassroots brands in *There* are fascinating examples of virtual micro-economies, they are not direct statements for or against particular corporate messaging. It is always encouraging to see independent upstarts unseat large corporations, but the user-created brands Book describes are not deliberately oppositional.

Other videogames have used the procedural affordances of the medium for the explicit purpose of rejoining specific corporations. In 1999, seven interactive fiction authors collaborated on *Coke Is It!*, a rewriting of six classic text adventures and interactive fiction works that lay bare the ubiquitous hand of Coca-Cola marketing.[57] The authors present the six rewrites (*Curses, Adventure, Planetfall, Hitchhiker, Grip*, and *A Bear's Night Out*) as buttons on a virtual vending machine. The goals of each game are replaced by variations on finding and swilling a delicious Coca-Cola. The following example is taken from *Coke Is It! Planetfall*:

>examine door

Through the window, you can see a large laboratory, dimly illuminated. A blue glow comes from a crack in the northern wall of the lab. Shadowy, ominous shapes move about within the room. On the floor, just a short distance inside the door, you can see a thing of beauty—a gleaming can of Coca-Cola, framed by the light shining through the window.

The developers also rewrote key default responses to further distort the experience:

>move door

It is fixed in place. Unlike a typical refreshing Coke.

The result is simple but effective. By forcing the player to interact with Coca-Cola, the game produces an absurd perversion of the original works of

interactive fiction, highlighting the inappropriateness of Coca-Cola's invasion of the media and the material world.

A more subtle anti-advertisement peppers another interactive fiction, *Book and Volume* by Nick Montfort.[58] The piece chronicles one night in the life of a sysadmin for nWare, the curious and increasingly dubious corporate hub of the fictional world nTopia. As the player makes his way around the city, completing last-minute server fixes before a big demo, increasingly strange visions appear to him. The game satirizes retail stores in general, but Montfort invents names for most of its stores—MarMart, Pharmicopia, Septisys. Spared shrouding are The Gap and Starbucks; the latter appears frequently throughout the city, a jibe at Starbucks' tendency to overcolonize the urban landscape. One independent coffeehouse, Independent Grounds remains in nTopia; presumably Starbucks forced the others out of business. If the player positions himself in front of Independent Grounds at a particular time during the game, he can witness its disassembly and replacement with another new Starbucks.

Book and Volume uses anti-advertising as a part of a subtle critique of consumerism and the culture of work. Other counteradvertising games are more deliberate in their attacks on specific corporations. The paint on software engineer Shawn McGough's new 2002 Mitsubishi Lancer started wearing away after only a few months. When Mitsubishi refused to make amends, McGough took the company to court. He won the case in a bittersweet $0 settlement. Feeling overwhelmed by lawyer culture, he decided to take the battle to "his own turf." McGough created *Melting Mitsubishi*, a web game that challenges the player to protect a yellow Lancer from falling rain.[59] The game borrows its gameplay from *Missile Command*;[60] the player fires circular blasts that expand to hit the falling droplets. While simplistic, the game successfully proceduralizes McGough's straightforward complaint against Mitsubishi: water destroys the paint. However, the game's procedural rhetoric is weak when unsupported by the verbal rhetoric of his written story, which accompanies the game in a menu.

More complex videogame grouses require more sophisticated procedural models of the complaint. My studio created *Disaffected!*, an anti-advergame about the FedEx Kinko's copy store. The game was conceived as a parody of the frustrating experience of patronizing such a store. The game puts the player in the role of employees forced to service customers under our perceptions of the organizational problems that plague Kinko's: other employees move orders around at random; employees sometimes get confused and

respond only to inverted movement control; other times employees refuse to work at all, and the player must switch to another; and even when orders are fulfilled customers often return dissatisfied (figure 7.10). *Disaffected!* is an arcade-style game; the player must service all the customers successfully to advance to the next level. In our representation of Kinko's "successful" service does not necessarily imply a completed order.

It is useful to compare *Disaffected!*'s procedural rhetoric with a commensurate verbal rhetoric. A customer might mount a written or phone complaint to Kinko's about their service, detailing the problems. A specific problem or sequence of problems might spark adequate dissatisfaction to warrant a written complaint. In the interest of comparison, consider the following contrived letter:

To Whom It May Concern:

On September 13 I went to your Crossroads branch to get some copies and pick up a print order I had sent through the website. When I got there, I was disappointed to find that three of the four copy machines were out of service. Then I had to wait

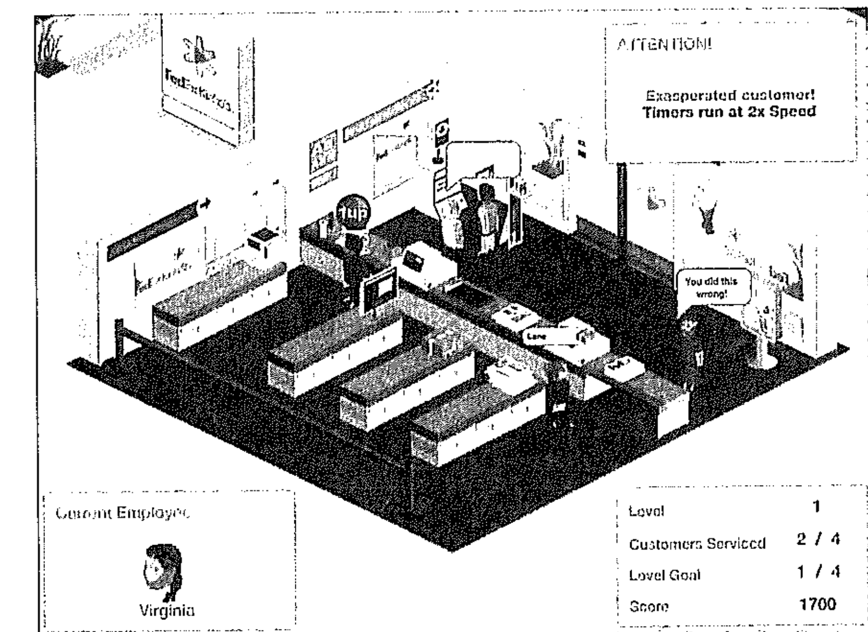

Figure 7.10 In *Disaffected!*, players control unmotivated workers at a simulated copy store.

at least 15 minutes in line. Even though there were five workers behind the counter, only one seemed to be doing anything. When it was finally my turn, the cashier helping me couldn't find my order. She looked in about five different places before coming back to ask me to repeat my name again. When she finally found the order under a big pile of other papers, I paid and left. But when I got to my car, I opened the bag and noticed that the order was printed on the wrong paper! I had to go back in and ask them to redo it, but I was already late for work.

This is the fourth time I've had almost the same problem at your store. Why should I come back to Kinko's after getting this kind of habitually bad service? I demand that you refund the $24.54 I spent on my incorrect order (a receipt is enclosed).

Very truly yours,
John Q. Customer

Many of us have written this kind of complaint letter. Most often, we write about a specific, personal problem requiring resolution. In fact, this is what consumer advocacy groups recommend. But habitual problems can never be solved by individual rejoinder. Better Business Bureau (BBB) reliability ratings notwithstanding, it is usually easier and cheaper for companies to pay individual reimbursements than to deal with the problems that create these issues. A game like *Disaffected!* universalizes the experience, casting it as a habitual and routine practice at Kinko's. Moreover, the operationalized version of the customer complaints produce actual frustration on the part of the player, something a letter or telephone call cannot possibly accomplish. While the complaint letter attempts to persuade the reader that the writer was wronged and deserves recompense, the anti-advergame attempts to persuade the player that the corporation is inoperative and must not be supported.

The decision to name Kinko's and to include their trademark in the game contributes to this effect. Despite a meaty disclaimer and appeal to the free speech rights granted to satire, we did not take lightly the decision to include the Kinko's name and trademark in the game. Whether or not they had the right to do so, Kinko's could easily have taken legal action for the representation. As a small studio, we would never have been able to combat the likes of a company as large as FedEx, and so we considered depicting a generic copy store with an evocative, yet distinctly different name (options we considered included Slacko's and Plinko's). The player would easily identify the target of our commentary. Such a technique is frequently used even in television satire. An early *Chappelle Show* sketch used this very tactic to attack Kinko's. In the

sketch, comedian Dave Chappelle plays the manager of Popcopy, where he teaches employees how to anger customers.[61] But just as advertisers promote their own, specific products and services in their own names, so we wanted to deprecate their products and services in their own names. In a world replete with branding, one should not shy away from critiquing the brands themselves, just as one would critique a corrupt statesperson by name, not by oblique reference. Molleindustria's *The McDonald's Videogame*, discussed in chapter 1, stands as another superb example of a game with this goal in mind.

Rather than deploying antitestimonial (e.g., publishing an account of a bad experience on a public website), anti-advergames deploy antidemonstratives. Just as *Curry House CoCo Ichibanya* demonstrates the operation of its licensor's corporate values, *Disaffected!* demonstrates the operation of its victim's corporate values. However, in the latter case, those values are represented as broken. Anti-advergames suggest an alternative to the precious form of procedural rhetoric I called the rhetoric of failure. *September 12* imposes rules that enforce barriers to success, elevating failure as an inevitable outcome of both missiles.[62] Its procedural rhetoric ensures that no strategy for precision firing will avoid taking innocent lives, and that such violence begets more violence. The game does not intend to suggest that we should let terrorists run rampant, but rather that the particular strategy of so-called precision attack is dysfunctional; a new one is required. In *September 12*, the goals are undesirable, and thus invocation of the game's rules lead to failure; it is not possible to win *September 12*. In *Disaffected!* the goals are desirable, but the game's rules are broken. While those rules may cause the player to fail in his attempt to service customers, that failure is endemic to the representation of the problem. The procedural rhetoric serves as a unit operation for Kinko's business practices.

Putting the player in the shoes of the employees rather than the customers changes the register of the discourse. While the verbal rhetoric necessarily focuses on self-interest and personal gain, the procedural rhetoric transfers the argument into one of corporate policy and, by extension, politics. The first-hand experience of the simulation of work enforces the rules of malcontent that produce individual customer service woes. The game thus speaks on two registers: first, the register of consumer dissatisfaction: the player can take pleasurable umbrage in the satirical representation of a typical Kinko's experience. Second, it speaks on the register of corporate malevolence: by virtue of his position behind the counter, the player can consider the possible reasons

behind the employee malaise that produces that customer experience—is it incompetence? Managerial hardship? Broader labor issues?

Disaffected! does not purport to proceduralize a solution to Kinko's customer service or labor issues. But its procedural rhetoric of incompetence does underscore the problem of disaffection in contemporary culture, on both sides of the counter. We're dissatisfied or unwilling to support structures of authority, but we do scarcely little about it. We go to work at lousy jobs with poor benefits and ill treatment. We shrug off poor customer service and bad products, assuming that nothing can be done and ignoring the reasons why workers might feel disenfranchised in the first place. We take for granted that we can't reach people in authority. These problems extend far beyond copy stores.

Anti-advergames thus have much in common with political games: they expose the logic of corporate and governmental structures and invite players to question them. Even though such games seem to contradict the goals of advergames that promote rather than depose, both types actually share fundamental principles: they demonstrate claims about the function (or dysfunction) of products and services, giving the player a first-person account of how the features and functions of those products and services intersect with his wants and needs. The player's evaluation of those claims as depicted in the game's rules opens a simulation gap, a space of crisis in which the persuasion game plays out. By offering a space for discourse about the use or value of a product, these advertisements encourage critical consumption: the reasoned and conscious interrogation of individual wants and needs, rather than manipulated subservience to corporate ones.

Learning