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# Bachelor Thesis

## Video Game Spaces and the Representation of the Character's Inner Journey

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## Abstract

Numerous analyses have focused on how video game spaces contribute to narratives and play an active role in storytelling. However, most of those studies tend to separate the environment design from the character, leaving on the side the idea that both elements collectively play a central role in shaping the story. Rarely do discussions address the direct connection between digital spaces and the protagonist's psyche, suggesting that some video game landscapes might directly represent the character's mind. By isolating these two entities, it exists a limited understanding regarding many aspects of space design and artistic decisions. This thesis investigates the intriguing relationship between video game spaces and the representation of the character's inner journey. The study explores the immersive and malleable nature of video game landscapes, showing that digital spaces have the capacity to represent complex themes, such as the character's psyche and their inner exploration. Making connections to other artistic movements, particularly those exploring the mind, allows a deeper understanding of the emotional role that spaces play as part of digital experiences.

This research is addressed to game artists finding themselves between storyteller and designer, especially those with an interest in human psychology and symbolism. It also contributes to a broader cultural conversation about the significance of video games in contemporary art and storytelling.

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# 1. Introduction

With the apparition of the first video games, the challenge that gameplay mechanics could offer to the players seemed to be the main reason why a game would become popular.[1] While the characters that were part of those experiences became iconic, the emotional impacts that environments could present remained a disregarded topic. That can be explained by the technical limitations that early game developers were coping with. However, nowadays the latest available software on the market allow game designers to enjoy an important freedom of creation. In addition, the possibilities that 3-D spaces offer put back into perspective the limits set by physical spaces. With the apparition of the virus SARS-CoV-2 and the regulations around the imposed lockdowns, the importance of digital spaces and the possibilities that they offer has been even more recognized.[2] In addition, the fact that the main game engines[3] available today propose an open-source (free) version gives the opportunity to anyone having the right material to rely on digital spaces as a way of expression. Additionally, the many options offered by those software invite its users to freely experiment and therefore create unique and personal worlds.

The accessibility of those tools is one reason that explains the rise of indie studios [4] in the last ten years. The titles that they propose generally present more unconventional themes than bigger studios, also called Triple-A, more attached to the commercial success of the experiences they offer. The success that few indie titles have known has massively impacted the gaming industry. Indeed, the smaller and more controversial experiences that they offer have attracted new gamers' profiles and created a niche in the industry. It is also possible to observe that Triple-A studios are integrating tools that independent developers

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[1] The early game Tennis for Two quickly became the most popular piece at an open house hosted at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, capturing the minds of those who played it, despite its total lack of fancy graphics or complicated controls. Plarium, "What Was the First Video Game? - Plarium," plarium.com, October 23, 2023, https://plarium.com/en/blog/the-first-video-game/.

[2] User numbers of the digital whiteboard Miro doubled from 5 million in May 2020 to 10 million in November 2020 "Miro Customer Success Story," Amazon Web Services, Inc., accessed November 16, 2023, https://aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/miro-case-study/.

"Microsoft Teams Grew Over 90% in 2020 Due To Pandemic; 145M Daily Active Users in 2021 | News | FOCUS ON Business - Created by Pro Progressio," FOCUS ON Business, June 30, 2021, https://focusonbusiness.eu/en/news/microsoft-teams-grew-over-90-in-2020-due-to-pandemic-145m-daily-active-users-in-2021/4223.

[3] The basic software of a computer game or video game

[4] Independent video game studios

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have developed, which proves the success and quality of their work. The integration of more personal and emotionally deep stories might also be justified by the fact that smaller studios are independent from big publishers and investors, who, with the use of financial pressure, play an important role in the direction that a certain game is taking.

However, even if the rise of indie games has been observed around the year 2005 with the apparition of new digital stores like *Steam*[5], it is only around the year 2010 that games mainly relying on space as a way to tell stories and convey emotions has emerged. Through those video games, it can be observed that narration plays a main role in shaping the experience.

In general, the place that storytelling took in recent games changed the way spaces have been used so far. More than being a gameplay placeholder, everything that surrounds the player started to be used as a tool of expression. Speechless narrative games like *Journey*[6] and *Inside*[7] gave a special importance to environments in general. Parally to that, narration in Triple-A games has pushed the creation of even more realistic spaces, also called "hyper-realism."[8] Even if game designers focusing on those kind of experiences draw their inspiration directly from reality, since they aim to reproduce it, the gap between realism and emotional representation that those spaces show, raise the question of authenticity in what is trying to be expressed. Even if nowadays, video game landscapes represent an important aspect of digital experiences, environments often seem to be a separate entity from the character. However, through different studies[9], it has been claimed that video game spaces have the power to encapsulate specific concepts and therefore reveal important narrative information that also concerns the character. It is also through navigation, a key element of space, that the game's story can enfold. Even ancient narration has always portrayed protagonists that must travel, and therefore move in space to live their adventure. Therefore, this disconnection between the character's journey and video game spaces is questionable. In addition, the different steps of a story are often a

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[5] Video game digital distribution service and storefront developed by Valve Corporation

[6] Journey, thatgamecompany, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, iOS, Microsoft Windows, Sony Computer Entertainment, 2012

[7] Inside, Playdead, Nintendo Switch, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, iOS, Xbox One, 2016

[8] Espen Aarseth and Stephan Günzel, eds., *Ludotopia: Spaces, Places and Territories in Computer Games* (transcript Verlag, 2019), https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839447307.

[9] Stephan Günzel, "Video Game Spaces as Architectural Metaphors," in *Video Game Spaces as Architectural Metaphors* (transcript Verlag, 2014), 217–26, https://doi.org/10.1515/transcript.9783839423721.217.

way to portray the character's evolution which goes hand in hand with their emotional exploration. Since moving in space is the only way for the player and the character to be able to experience the narrative in its entire form, video games spaces play a major role in capturing the character's emotions. More than that, the advancement of technology allows the representation of numerous abstract concepts through digital spaces. Therefore, video game spaces have the potential to symbolically represent the character's inner journey, providing a deeper understanding of their emotional and psychological growth.

The challenge of this thesis is to succeed in bringing the two following thematic together: First, video game spaces and their immersive power. Second, the character's inner journey and its representation through diver art forms.

To do so, the first part will be dedicated to defining what video game spaces are. The reason why it was preferable to base this thesis on spaces instead of environments, which is often mistaken as being similar, is because, more than being material, spaces are conceptual. The complexity of their nature has therefore proved to be more aligned with the topic. Secondly, in order to understand how the character's inner journey can be represented, diverse artistic movements will be introduced. Indeed, throughout the evolution of art, artists have shown a need to capture their emotions in a more transparent way, resulting in the apparition of new artistic genres. The interest in human psychology that occurred around the 18<sup>th</sup> Century has revolutionized literature, paintings and cinema. Exploring the so-called "unconscious" has proved to be a well of inspiration for many artists. Nowadays, important similarities between those movements and the one of video games can be observed.

Finally, the last part will present more applied techniques in how video game spaces can be manipulated. Based on the information that the previous chapters covered, a few games that rely on spaces as a way to represent the character's inner journey will be analyzed.

As many art pieces and video games call for a subjective understanding of the themes they address, it is important to keep in mind that certain points discussed in this thesis are hypothetical. Giving a clear explanation of what those works might represent could prove to be delicate. Indeed, the beauty of those oeuvres is the topics' complexity they tackle. The goal of this thesis is therefore not to translate the artists' work but instead to call for a deeper and more complex understanding of video game spaces in general.

## 2. Understanding Video Game Spaces

### 2.1 Definition and characteristics of video game spaces

Since the beginning of the video games' history, the idea of space has been of great importance. In fact, using space was already the main component of early game mechanics. The goal of the bestseller *Pong*[10] was that two players respectively would move a line on the screen space avoiding the ball to fall out of the limit. Following this game, *Space Invaders*[11] and *Pac-Man*[12] were also exploiting the screen space and the character's movement as main interactions. Later on, the apparition of 3-D and the reconstitution of the "natural" behavior of gravity as part of game engines revolutionized the idea of space. Game creators were finally able to reconstruct familiar environments as part of their creations. It is not surprising that one of the first games[13] using 3-D is a simulation of a "real" battle zone. Game designers, as much as other artists, find their inspirations in their own environment. Even if each of those individuals has a subjective view on the world leading to the creation of unique works, the images that they compose are often a reproduction or a deformation of what surrounds them. In fact, paintings, in the history of humanity, had the primary purpose of capturing and representing human actions or natural scenes. It is surprisingly rare to see any kind of human representation in Prehistorical paintings. They were essentially composed of different animals, showing that human beings were equally sharing their environment with nature. However, even if at that time, humankind had the capacity to paint on the surface, they were still missing a big part of realism.

The mathematization of perspective during the Renaissance revolutionized the way of showing human actions because it tends to objective the concept of representation based on an individual view of the world. As Daniel Arasse, French historian retracing the history of

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[10] Pong, Allan Alcorn, Atari, NA/EU: Atari, JP: Atari Japan, Arcade, Microsoft Windows, Linux, OSX, 1972

[11] Space Invaders, Taito, Atari Inc., Tomohiro Nishikado, Underground Development, JP/AS/EU: Taito NA/EU: Midway AU: Leisure & Allied Industries Atari, Inc. Atari 2600, Arcade and more, 1978

[12] Pac-Man, Tōru Iwatani, JP/DE: Namco, NA/FRA: Midway, Arcade, Atari 2600, Nintendo Switch, Android and more, 1980

[13] Battlezone, Ed Rotberg, Owen Rubin, NA/EU: Atari, Inc. JP: Sega/Taito, Atari 2600, Arcade, Xbox 360, Atari 8-bits and more, 1980

perspective, explains: "The point of continuation […] is the projection in the interpretation of the spectator' eye. The world organizes itself depending on the spectator's position"[14] The fifteen centuries marked a period during which distances and time together started to be measured. And that, with the creation of the mechanical clock by Filippo Brunelleschi, inventor of the perspective's concept. "What is happening at that time is a new conception of the measure of space and time" adds Arasse. This mathematization of elements has been the turning point of the video games' invention. As Stephan Schwingeler, art and media professor explains: "Current three-dimensional computer graphics use the same mathematical and geometrical principles as Renaissance painter – namely the principles of perspective"[15] In fact, as much as paintings based on linear perspective do, 3-D games are also the translation of a three-dimensional space onto one planar surface where elements are placed on an imaginary grid giving the feeling of size, depth and distance. In addition, the same phenomenon that was occurring during the Renaissance can be observed in video games: As much as artists had the objective to depict an authentic image of the world, game designers are creating worlds that feel more and more realistic. (Image[16])

[14] Translate from french. *L'invention de La Perspective (4/10) | Histoires de Peintures, Par Daniel Arasse*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XTaxcQdTVM.

[15] Aarseth and Günzel, *Ludotopia*.

[16] The School of Anthens, Raphael, 1509-1511, Fresco, 500x700cm, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Christopher Heuer, "Perspective as Process in Vermeer," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (September 2000): 82–99, https://doi.org/10.1086/RESv38n1ms20167509.

This realistic tendency is also described as "hyper-realistic"[17] The concept is described by Schwingeler as: "Images depicting spaces and objects that have no reference in the *space of bodily presence* and therefore do not exist but seem plausible and convincing"[18] Therefore, spaces in video games are not per say realistic but tend to recreate, with the use of gravity, light calculation and other advanced settings, a plausible representation of the world.

The fact that video games spaces present elements that are functioning independently of the physical world allow game designers to enjoy an important freedom of manipulation. However, the question of authenticity in the context of video games spaces has been the topic of much debate in this field.

When researching on the topic of space in video games, it is common to read the term "representation". The notion also takes all its importance as part of this thesis. A "representation" is the depiction of an element, a person or an idea in written, visual, performed or spoken language. This representation can either be made in a realistic form (without any modification of the existing element) or in a more abstract way, where the artist decides to make use of another element than the one that they aim to represent. In all cases, the idea of representation is the reconstructing an element that already exists either physically or in the imaginary.[19]

In video games, the debate around a representation is even more important than in other medias like cinema because elements present in digital spaces must be (re)created from the ground up in order to exist. Even if in cinema and photography, representing a certain concept sometimes asks for the reconstitution of a certain scenario, the idea of "capturing the world as it" is much more present and spontaneous in those art forms than in video games. As Stephan Günzel explains when quoting Henry Jenkins and Celia Pearce:

"In computer games we experience spaces that were built by game designers with a certain intention. Gamers should recognize these places and spaces due to a former experience. This experience doesn't have to be limited to the experience of a real place, but could also come from films or other media – a simulated place."[20]

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[17] Aarseth and Günzel, *Ludotopia*.

[18] Aarseth and Günzel.

[19] "Representation," English Conceptual Learning, March 31, 2016, http://englishtextualconcepts.nsw.edu.au/content/representation.

[20] Günzel, "Video Game Spaces as Architectural Metaphors."

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The importance of the word "built" takes all its sense in this quote. Game designers must *build* elements to reconstruct a certain space. The fact that there is a necessity to rebuild existing objects questions the true nature of video games spaces as being spaces at all. Therefore, in order to understand what a video game space is, it is required to understand how "true" space is actually translated in video games.

Based on the definition of "Cyberspaces" by the philosopher Anita Leirfall, the reason why we talk about space instead of places is because: "[…] A place is always a limitation of, or, in, space. Place can never exist independently of its spatial original. It must stand in a necessary and inevitable relation to space to be considered a space at all. …"[21] The "cyberspace" that Leirfall talks about can only exist as part of the "real"[22] physical space. In that case, this real space is conceptual rather than material. Espen Aerseth, Norwegian academic interested in video games and ludology, adds that the fact that "cyberspaces" "[…] are not real space but objects and places is the only reason we can perceive them at all"[23] That connects to the idea that "virtual spaces are most often not true spaces but collections of separate objects" [24] Those ideas bring another question to the surface: "What makes a space an actual space?"

In 1974, Henri Lefebvre, French philosopher interested in the question of sociology and geography, wrote *La production de l'espace*[25]. The writing will be recognized more importantly with the geographer's book Edward Soja: *Postmodern Geographies* [26]. The concept behind space that those two theorists presented is quoted in the work of numerous philosophers including those already mentioned. The idea behind Lefebvre's and Soja's concept is that space is organized in three interconnected stages: the first stage, called "spatial practice", refers to the perceived space also known as nature which is modified by humans. The second stage, "the representations of space", is also a produced space resulting of urbanism, the "conceived space". Those two stages result of the "representational spaces" or "lived" space, where culture and social life find themselves.

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[21] Espen Aarseth, "Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer Games," January 1, 2001, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7643-8415-9_13.

[22] Günzel, "Video Game Spaces as Architectural Metaphors."

[23] Aarseth, "Allegories of Space."

[24] Simona De Iulio, "Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media," *Questions de communication*, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 473–75, https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.5949.

[25] Henri Lefebvre, "La production de l'espace," *L'Homme et la société* 31, no. 1 (1974): 15–32, https://doi.org/10.3406/homso.1974.1855.

[26] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, 1989).

Thus, space is at all the levels produced. This "triad of space"[27] has been differently remapped into video games by diver theorists. As it would be too complex to cover them all as part, only a few would be mentioned.

For Espen Aerseth, the spatial representation in video games is only a reduction of the idea of spatiality because the fabrication of a so-called space in video games takes out the real essence of it. The fact that a workable gameplay must be added in the game is a deviation of the idea that in real space, only "social rules and physical laws" [28] exist. For Aerseth, video games spaces are "allegories of space". They represent an abstract concept of what real space should be in a concrete form resulting of something that is, thus, not space.

Joining the idea of Aerseth, Stephan Günzel speaks about video game spaces as being a "transfer" [29] of the physical space but also a "reduction" of it. Those spaces, more than being "metaphors" are "metonymies" of space. Video games spaces express the concept of an actual space through different methods of visualization and experimentation. For those two philosophers, video games spaces are a real space's reduction.

However, recent video games have proved to be an augmentation of space rather than a reduction of it, where phenomena that couldn't occur in physical space become possible. *Kid A Exhibition[30]*, an experience created by the English band Radiohead in 2021, pictures the exhibition of their visual and audio works. The adventure is an exploration of marvelous locations where flying particles, dancing creatures and omnipresent music can be found. What can be experienced as part of the game would be impossible in real space. That leads to reflecting on which of the space between the virtual and the physical one is a reduction of the other. The fact that video game spaces can be seen as allegories and metaphors of space also prove that they are manipulable enough to represent any kind of ideas or concepts, which is not always the case of real space, where the limitation of what can be experienced can quickly be felt.

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[27] Andri Gerber and Ulrich Götz, eds., *Architectonics of Game Spaces: The Spatial Logic of the Virtual and Its Meaning for the Real* (transcript publishing, 2019).

[28] Aarseth, "Allegories of Space."

[29] Günzel, "Video Game Spaces as Architectural Metaphors."

[30] Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, PlayStation 5, Microsoft Windows, macOS, Epic Games, 2021

(Image[31])
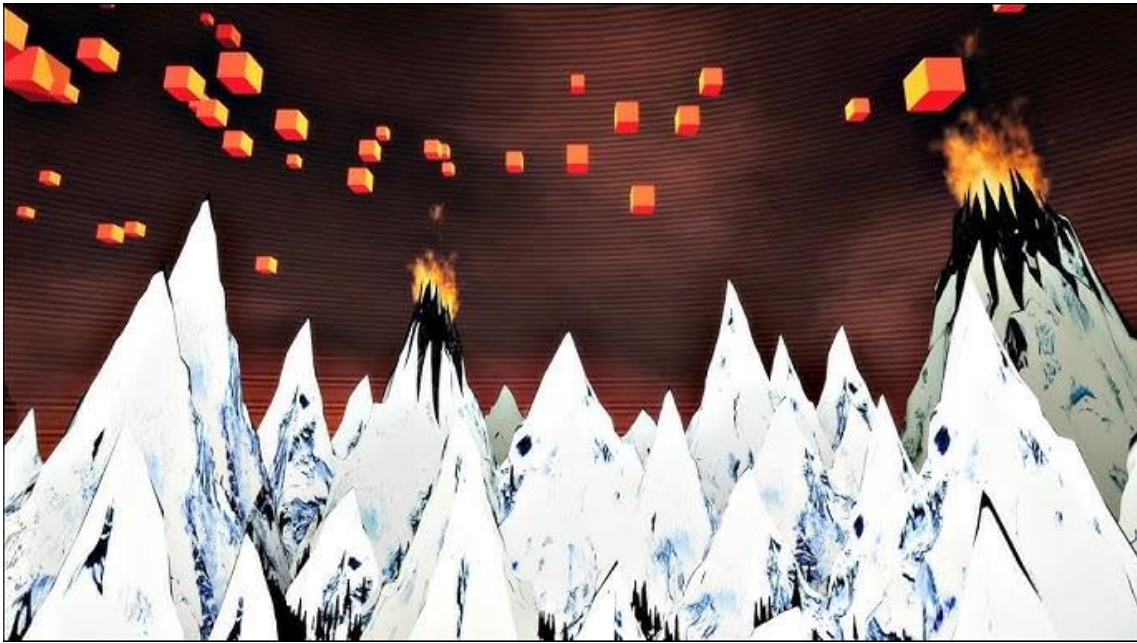


Based on the concept of Lefebvre, space, more than being produced, is also "conceived" and "lived". It is not only physically experienced but culturally and socially. The combination of those three aspects makes it a space. Moreover, space is individually perceived and thus subjectively modified, giving birth to unique perceptions of what space is and the way it should be used. Culture, which is an important aspect of Lefebvre's work, has resulted in different space's form or at least, different understandings and visualizations of it. For example, in the end of the 1980s, artists of the hip-hop [32] movement used public spaces as a way to showcase their artistic expressions. The movement allowed to portray public and urban spaces in a more positive way than how it was seen at the time.

Video games have the power to build specific spaces that can be used by the players. In addition to the previous points, Stephan Günzel talks about video game spaces as "exemplifications of spatial concepts"[33] It highlights the idea that more than proposing a different perception of what space could be, video games have the power to concretize those concepts by making them visual and interactable. Just like Lefebvre describes real

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[31] The Mountains, Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, 2021, *KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION - OFFICIAL TRAILER*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOinMjQ9jo8.

[32] Popular culture that emerged in the United States in the 1980s. It included rap music and graffiti art

[33] Aarseth and Günzel, *Ludotopia*.

space as being in one hand conceived, out of subjective perception, and in the other hand, lived, video game spaces also present visual elements inspired by the physical environment. It results of a unique and personal experience made possible by the game interactions. Thus, video game spaces are not per say a copy of the real world but propose another form of it.

The fact that space is something experienced brings the importance of movement as an essential factor of its composition. Moving in space gives the opportunity for the player to discover what the game space has to offer based on their own perspective. Depending on the chosen-perspective and camera placement, the space is also divulgated differently. In a third-person or first-person view, the space is revealed according to the character's movement, pushing the player to explore the game. Construction of space has a direct connection with the avatar's movement that the player embodies. Discovering what the game has to offer also implies walking from locations to locations. It is the sum of all those locations that constitute the game space. When Karla Theilhaber, creative game producer, talks about space in video games, she points out the importance of Michel de Certeau's concept: "In contrast to location" that can be defined as "[…]a constellation of fixed spots - spaces are constructed by movement in such a constellation"[34]. It joins the idea of Lev Manovich, artist, author and theorist of digital culture, that "rather than conceiving space as a totality, one is dealing with a set of separate places"[35]

Finally, as we already pointed out, movement is an important notion of space because space, more than being produced and "conceived", is also "lived"[36] When defining space, De Certeau adds that "space is a location that you are doing something with. A space is constructed by actions or people telling stories about actions". It is those actions, connected to space, that result of an important concept: Narration.

In the act of moving, the player experiences the narration which is part of all the locations or levels that constitute the game. Thus, moving can be seen as a travel or journey for the player, where different actions and parts of the narration will take place on their way. It is also through movement and actions that the players will have the occasion to interact with

[34] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984).

[35] Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media, *Questions de communication*, no. 4 (December 1, 2003) P257, https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.5949.

[36] Gerber and Götz, *Architectonics of Game Spaces*.

the story and impact it.


## 2.2 Importance of immersion in video games and the way it is produced


Since video games are the first media which give the opportunity to the spectators to become actors of a story, the notion of immersion is of a great importance.
A predominant idea of immersion is that it succeeds in bringing users into a universe which is different than the reality that most people are familiar with. It is the art of pushing this reality on the side and instead, create the illusion that another type of reality can be plausible enough that it takes over on the familiar one. Janet Murray, professor in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology defines immersion as a:

"[…]Metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge of the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus…"[37]

Murray's definition is considered one of the most accepted explanations of what immersion is. The radical transition between the physical reality and another universe is described as "a plunge in the ocean". This sudden change of element implies users to act in consequence and adapt to this new environment, taking distance from the reality in which they were before. Indeed, Murray adds that: "[…] immersion implies learning to swim, to do the things that the new environment makes possible… the enjoyment of immersion as a participatory activity." One main reason why video games have the capacity to be more immersive than other media is because they invite users to become active members of the experience. Additionally, exercising actions help in the feeling of immersion because it makes the world in which the users are more believable. Even though Murray takes the example of the physical sensation of being submerged or plugging in the water, she precises that it metaphorical but also that "[…] we seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience" that we do from such an environmental change.

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[37] Janet Murray, "Hamlet on the Holodeck," MIT Press, accessed November 13, 2023, https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262533485/hamlet-on-the-holodeck/.

This new environment in which players are psychologically transported, implies users to be able to exercise actions that must be coherent with the proposed world.

However, there are a few characteristics that game designers must respect in order to create the illusion that the designed world is believable and thus immersive. It is important to keep in mind that immersion is a subjective feeling. If a game is immersive for one player, it is not ultimately the case for another. Each player has specific expectations, needs and motivations. If those criteria are not respected, the game's immersion might be less important for one player than the other.

However, narration and its way of being communicated has proved to play an important role for the player over whole immersion. This feeling is characterized, at the first front, by the emotional attachment the player has to the character. This will result in a certain engagement in the game. In the first part of Murray's definition, she explains that: "A stirring narrative in any medium can be experienced as a virtual reality because our brains are programmed to tune into stories with an intensity that can obliterate the world around us." It is in human nature to tell each other stories and that is because they are predisposed to feel and intellectualize situations. It is easier for most humans to get information when they are communicated through stories because it implies putting emotions at the first front, bringing them back to situations they might have already lived. Thus, the fact that narration proposes a certain setting that stages particular emotions helps in feeling empathy and attachment to the characters that are presented.

The way players approach games and experience a proposed story also depends on their personal experiences. In opposite to cinema which also portraits characters to whom the spectator can get attached to, video games are interactive. Thus, it is through the avatar that players learn and experience the game. When speaking about the connection between the avatar and the player, Teun Dubbelman, interested in the question of narrative as part of games, writes: "Rune Klevjer (2006, 10) has written extensively on this phenomenon in What is the Avatar, describing the relationship between player and avatar as "a prosthetic relationship; through a process of learning and habituation, the avatar becomes an extension of the player's own body.""[38] The avatar is just a figure that allows to view the game from a certain perspective like a first-person perspective or an over the shoulder

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[38] Aarseth and Günzel, *Ludotopia*.

perspective[39]. However, proposing an avatar that matches the world's theme adds another level of credibility to the proposed universe. In fact, when Dubbelman talks about the relation between the player and the avatar he adds: "The avatar is needed in a computer-simulated and screen-projected space to mediate the feeling of presence" [40] The notion of presence in defining immersion has a certain importance as those two terms seem to correlate.

Presence is the sensation of physically "being there" no matter if the environment is "real" or "animated but non-existent"[41] It is also the result of immersion which is a bigger concept and includes different notions.

The alteration of space that can occur when feeling present in a game also has an impact on players' notion of time. By adopting the concept of time that one game proposes, players seem to be completely rooted in the present moment. In other words, they tend to suspend their reflection on the past or the future of their actual life. This time's alteration has big advantages since it allows players to put their own reality on the side and thus feel completely part of the proposed world. In result of it, their motivation to play the game as well as their connection with the character they embody will be increased. This time's alteration can particularly happen when a story is told. The players are brought to events that happened or might have happened but experience it in the time period the game is proposes. In Dubbelman's text, Christian Metz compare presence to the notion of chronology as the following:

"Reality assumes presence, which has a privileged position along two parameters, space and time; only the here and now are completely real. By its very existence, the narrative suppresses the now (accounts of current life) or the here (live television coverage), and most frequently the two together (newsreels, historical accounts, etc.)" [42]

Another important parameter of immersion is the alignment between players' expectations

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[39] When the camera is placed on the top side of the avatar. That would have an impact on the way the game is experienced.

[40] Aarseth and Günzel, *Ludotopia*.

[41] Quoted from Jonathan Steuer, "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence," *Journal of Communication* 42, no. 4 (1992): 73–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1992.tb00812.x.

[42] Quoted from Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/F/bo3645302.html.

and the proposed world. As immersion is a form of illusion, it is important to offer a world which prevents players from getting back to their actual reality. If one game's element doesn't match the player's expectation, big chances are that they would understand that the game has just been manipulated to be plausible. It is the same feeling that can occur when seeing a black shirt technician appearing during a theater piece or when Truman in the movie *The Truman Show* [43] realizes that the deep blue sky that he has been seeing all his life is just a wall. (Image[44])



The disillusion might be so big that the entire experience could broke. Thus, even when the world is fictional and belongs to the fantasy genre, elements should function approximately in the same way that players expect them to function in the real world. It is also in this way that a smooth learning experience of the gameplay can happen. The game, if it matches players' expectations, doesn't necessarily have to rely on words to give gameplay's indications.

Steve Gaynor, creator of the walking simulator, *Gone Home*[45], explains that immersion is "[…] a question of projecting yourself into the space that the character is occupying." [46] Besides the audio visuals credibility of the environment, it is about giving the players the

[43] The Truman Show, Peter Weir, US 1998, TC 01:30:00—1:34:00

[44] Ending Scene, The Truman Show, Peter Weir,1998

[45] Gone Home, Fullbright, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, 2013

[46] "Level Design in a Day: The Level Design of Gone Home," accessed November 14, 2023, https://gdcvault.com/play/1022112/Level-Design-in-a-Day.

tools to occupy a role and not putting anything in the game that break players' expectations. Thus, for the players to feel like they embody a character, the game must present enough interactive freedom.

Finally, when the game presents enough elements that can be connected to what the players are familiar with in their own environment, their imagination will naturally add the missing details to draw a complete image of a particular location. In fact, leaving space for the player's imagination will help immersion. It would also put the players in a more active position. That is one technique that *Gone Home*'s creators used to design some locations, like the teenager room found in the game's house. (Image[47])



This active position can also be called engagement, another benefit of immersion and presence. It is when the player feels motivated enough to keep on playing. A challenging gameplay like in *Dark Souls*[48] can feel as engaging as the exploration of a mysterious world like in *Inside*[49]. It is again a subjective feeling which occurs in comparison to the players' expectations.

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[47] The teenager room, Gone Home, Fullbright, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, 2013, Heather Alexandra, "Gone Home: Console Edition Review," Fanbyte, accessed November 16, 2023, https://www.fanbyte.com/legacy/gone-home-console-edition-review.

[48] Dark Souls serie, FromSoftware, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows, 2011

[49] Inside, Playdead, Nintendo Switch, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, iOS, Xbox One, 2016

When immersion is reached, the player is predisposed to feel diver emotions that game designers want to convey. It results in more impactful experiences, that, as much as a book or a movie can do, push the players to reflect on their own environment and daily life. Being immersed also induces that the player is "merging" with the game's character. More than being master of the character's actions, there is also an interest from the player toward the character's psychology. The hidden reasons why the protagonist is living a certain adventure or has ended up in a specific place can be understood through the concept of the inner journey.

# 3. Inner Journey of Characters

## 3.1 Explanation of the concept of the character's inner journey

Even though the idea behind the concept isn't explicitly defined by artists who integrate it in their works, it is common in narration to find characters that, throughout adventures, are in search of who they are. This quest for identity can be characterized through diverse forms: The heroic adventures of Homer[50] which has shaped many narratives, the physical transformation of tortured characters in the horror genre or the romantic explorations of Lee Holloway in the movie *Secretary[51]*. While those stories express diver emotions and belong to different genres, they all portrait one main character, in general the hero, who will change throughout the story. Indeed, a journey can be defined by "the act of travelling from one place to another"[52] which indicates the idea of movement. But another definition that the same dictionary proposes is: "A set of experiences that someone has over a period of time, especially when they change the person in some way" In his interview, Michael Hauge, American consultant, author and lecturer, marks the existence of two different journeys as part of the whole character's inner journey: the journey of accomplishments, also called the outer journey, during which a series of obstacles, conflicts and encounters will take. The second journey or inner journey will follow the same structure, but the conflicts and faced obstacles will come from within the character. The whole journey is in

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[50] *Homer. The Odyssey. London: New York: W. Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's sons, 1919.*

[51] Secretary,  Steven Shainberg, US 2003

[52] "Journey," November 8, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/journey.

fact a "journey of transformation"[53] It is through the different experiences that the characters are invited to live that they will be subject of change. No matter how this transformation is represented in a story, it will always be the result of an emotional change. Hayao Miyazaki, Japanese mangaka, often represents characters transforming into animals as a representation of their internal evolution. In one of his movies *Spirited Away*[54], the subject of dehumanization is omnipresent. The workers who slowly forget who they are, end up transforming themselves into frogs.

Moreover, there is always the idea of traveling and movement in the character's inner journey. In Hollywood cinema, this travel generally follows a more codified structure that defines precise steps that the narrative could follow. In opposite to independent or eastern cinema, which tends to break this pattern. The concept of the hero's journey has been so widely used and analyzed that repeating what the notion is precisely about would be counterproductive. However, it has played such an important role in shaping a character's evolution as part of a story that mentioning the notion remains important. In fact, what is interesting behind the history of the hero's journey's concept is that it has passed from one hand to another. Joseph Campbell, American writer, wrote in 1949 the book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*[55]. In his oeuvre, Campbell analyzes the archetype of a hero's evolution by focusing on different types of mythology and comparing them. His interest in anthropology also pushed him to study the work of diver psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Especially the place of dreams in people's motivation to change and explore unknown territories. Campbell drew numerous amounts of steps that most heroes go through. Later, Christopher Vogler, a Hollywood script-doctor[56] popularized the concept of the hero's journey by writing a screenwriting textbook about the topic.[57] Vogler also worked for Disney studios and Fox 2000 pictures, which could explain the reason why most Hollywood films follow the classical structure of "the twelve stages of the hero's journey". It is interesting to observe that as much as in Greek mythology, the inner journey is metaphorized by a travel that pushes the character to leave their home, also understood as the comfort zone, the most famous Hollywood movies stage characters that must travel

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[53] *What Screenwriters Should Know About A Character's Inner Journey - Michael Hauge*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZfadIf5zpo.

[54] Spirited Away, Hayao Miyazaki, Ghibli Studio, Japan 2001

[55] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New World Library, 2008).

[56] A person in charge of improving a script

[57] Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Michael Wiese Productions, 2007).

to unknown places to find "their true selves".

While the character's inner journey is always about a certain movement towards mystery, it doesn't always have to be represented through the idea of a big adventure described in American oeuvres. Sometimes the unknown place may turn out to be the location where the characters already find themselves in. Where does our reality start to feel strange or even grotesque? And where is the limit between the known and the unknown?

David Lynch, American filmmakers, is one of the most famous artists able to represent the uncanny in cinema. Through all his films, the reality of the characters he portraits suddenly becomes strange. Dream and reality start merging, raising the question: What happened when and where? In fact, Lynch invites the spectator to travel into the character's mind, a space in which all kind of obscurities and questionings can occur. It is in fact common in his films to find traumas' references, like in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*[58] that seems to touch upon the topic of sexual abuse. In fact, all his movies start with a mystery to solve, symbolized by an object found, which could represent the starting point of the characters' inner journey. As Michael Hauge explains, to portraits the character's inner journey in a story is to present "the tug-of-war between being safe but unfulfilled and being terrified but achieving the goal and transforming" [59] However, does it always mean that the character's inner journey must end up positively? Does it always present a "visible finish line as Hauge explains? Even if the inner journey is the representation of a character that feels stuck in a certain situation and moves towards transformation, it doesn't always signify that the goal of finding or accepting their true selves is always reached. It also happens that some characters get lost on the way, trapped in a reality that they can't escape. In *Brazil*[60] Sam Lowry escapes the dystopic totalitarian society in which he is, by dreaming. When he realizes that the woman that he has been dreaming of turns out to be existing, he decides to rebel himself against the system in which he is and join the cause that Jill Layton has been trying to defend. At that point, the spectators are on-board in an exciting adventure where romance seems to be the weapon of the two characters. Until the very last minute, we all believe that Sam will fulfill his mission and join the love of his life. When he finally escapes from the dystopic city in which he was trapped in, the spectators are dragged back to where Sam really finds himself in, sitting on an electric chair. We understand that the

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[58] Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me, David Lynch, US 1992

[59] *What Screenwriters Should Know About A Character's Inner Journey - Michael Hauge*.

[60] Brazil, Terry Gilliam, UK 1995

protagonist got lost in his dreams and that there is no way to physically escape this world. (Image[61])



Spectators, readers, gamers are in general exposed to happy endings, which makes it tedious to propose another kind of model. In general, the concept of an ending seems to be omnipresent in narration. It is rare to see stories that make the choice not to offer a clear explanation of what just happened on screen. However, the suspension of time that an infinite ending presents is a powerful way to keep a story existing endlessly. In fact, the character's inner journey doesn't always have an end. Is it quite often the quest of an entire life.

## 3.2 Factors influencing the character development in video games

As previously seen, the character's inner journey is about internal change and development. This evolution, which is not necessarily a positive one, is generally encrypted in the outer world as a visible motivation for the character to change. In this

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[61] The tortured scene, Brazil, Terry Gilliam, 1995"'Brazil', film d'anticipation de Terry Gilliam," storytelling, rts.ch, August 18, 2017, https://www.rts.ch/info/culture/cinema/8814585-brazil-film-danticipation-de-terry-gilliam.html.

inner journey, the protagonist expresses a need for discovery and movement. Thus, the inner journey can be seen as a movement of the mind where elements are no longer still, or more precisely stuck in a certain place, but in activity.

In video games, the mind's movement can be observed through the physical motion of the character. Starting an adventure assumes moving in space. As mentioned in the first chapter, movement is a non-negotiable aspect of space. In this section, it has been explained that motion in space can be seen as a journey. This comparison between the protagonist's movement and the experience of traveling is mentioned by Lev Manovisch:

"In *Doom* and *Myst* – and in a great many other computer games – narrative and time itself are equated with the movement through 3-D space, the progression through rooms, levels, or words. In contrast to modern literature, theatre, and cinema which are built around the psychological tensions between the characters and the movement in psychological space, these computer games return us to the ancient forms of narrative where the plot is driven by the spatial movement of the main hero […]"[62]

In fact, the psychological space that Manovisch is talking about was already represented in ancient narrations and mythology through the hero's adventure and their movement through a certain space. Even if the quote marks the separation between psychological space on one hand in modern literature, theatre and cinema, and on another in early literature and interactive spaces, a direct connection exists between both. It is only the way this psychological space is represented which changes from one work to another. Thus, it is through the character's physical movement that their psychology is revealed. Moving in space can therefore be seen as unfolding the story that is part of this internal space, where each location presents an aspect of the narrative. That leads to reflect around the following question: Is narration an indispensable aspect of the character's evolution? In *Videogame Wastelands as (Non-)Places and 'Any-Space-Whatevers'*, Souvik Mukherjee wrote: "Many, though not all, games tell stories […]" [63] It is more the way that narration is told that changes from one game to another than the absence or the presence of a story within a game. However, the integration of a solid or pre-written narrative helps in drawing a logical character's development. The alignment of the game's elements with the story leads

[62] De Iulio, "Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media."

[63] Souvik Mukherjee, "Videogame Wastelands as (Non-)Places and 'Any-Space-Whatevers,'" in *Videogame Wastelands as (Non-)Places and 'Any-Space-Whatevers'* (transcript Verlag, 2019), 167–84, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839447307-009.

to a better understanding of the context in which the character is developing. As the narrative and the character's development are linked, discovering the diver elements that compose the game allows to gain a better understanding of the character's psychology. In many cases, the player discovers the world in which the characters find themselves at the same time as the protagonist they embody. As explained, this learning phase is symbolically important in the inner journey's concept.

This discovery can be characterized by symbolic figures that are meat on the way, like enemies that could represent a life obstacle or allies. In both cases, the character gains experiences, often represented in classical forms of gameplay as a physical evolution of power or augmentation of XP[64]. However, it also exists games that are less attached to the idea of winning and losing but rather focus on the emotional value of the experience that they propose. In that case, the meeting of certain characters can be an important aspect of the narrative's evolution. Those figures can be seen as doors that, when opened, can reveal important information about the protagonist's identity.

Physical transformations can also symbolically represent the development of the character's psychology. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a technique that is omnipresent in Hayao Miyazaki's movies.

The identity's research which is directly linked to the one of character's evolution might also take place through the finding of items. This aspect of a character's inner exploration has often been used in David Lynch's movies where the plot generally starts with the discovery of an intriguing object or clue. Objects can be seen as a missing piece of the puzzle, giving more information on elements that concern the character, in a direct or indirect way. In an indirect way, they can either symbolize an idea. For example, flowers often represent the essence of life. Or be directly informative, like a letter can contain important information. In video games, the same phenomenon can happen. In addition to it, objects in video games often have a direct impact on the gameplay. When found, those items might accompany the character throughout the entire game as a symbol of their evolution. In other cases, objects can punctually appear and unlock different levels that constitute the game. A key, for example, is the kind of punctual item, which is heavily symbolic as it allows players and characters to discover what hides behind a door: the

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[64] Experience points

unknown. (Image[65])



It is interesting to observe that walking simulators, a sub-genre of adventure games, are essentially based on movement and environmental interactions. The freedom of exploration associated with narration, which often takes an important place in those kinds of experiences, gives the feeling of a character's evolution as well as the unknown's discovery. It is more the sensation that walking and interacting with objects gives which provides the feeling of character's development than the ultimate hero's evolution. The main reason for such a phenomenon is that many walking simulators propose a first person-view. The camera placement creates a non-dissociation between the character and the player. Thus, the way the player approaches the game is different than in a third-person experience where the story is indirectly told to them. Therefore, it is tempting to see walking simulators as a player's inner journey since the narrative is directly presented to them.

In addition, the action of walking in literature has often been associated with the movement of the mind. Kenneth Grahame, British author famous in children's literature, writes in *The*

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[65] Finding the ear, David Lynch, Blue Velvet, 2003, "The Secret History of the 'Blue Velvet' Ears," EW.com, accessed November 14, 2023, https://ew.com/movies/2017/10/18/blue-velvet-ears/.

*fellow that goes alone*[66]:

"Nature's particular gift to the walker, through the semi-mechanical act of walking — a gift no other form of exercise seems to transmit in the same high degree — is to set the mind jogging, to make it garrulous, exalted, a little mad maybe — certainly creative and suprasensitive, until at last it really seems to be outside of you and as if it were talking to you whilst you are talking back to it[…]"

The act of walking as a way to "set the mind jogging" is often combined with the idea of loneliness. It is also a parameter always present in walking simulators and other games where navigation in space is a key mechanic. For the player, loneliness in the game, is a way to discover the character they embody. It is this intimate relationship between the character and the player that, when combined with the player's actions and experiences, leads to the protagonist's evolution.

As it is not a punctual phenomenon, the notion of time takes all its importance. It is also important to note the logical and physical connection between time and distances. Since each step of the experience the game has to offer is encrypted in space or in other words in the distances that the player covers, there is a direct connection between time and player's experience, or time and character's evolution. It is what Manovisch highlighted in the quote: "[…] narrative and time itself are equated with the movement through 3-D space" [67] However, instead of directly speaking about character's evolution, Manovisch talks about the connection between narration and time. As explained earlier, it is from the narrative that flows the game mechanics and thus the player's experience leading to the character's development.

As Grahame points out, walking alone allows the mind to travel. Reflection as part of the character's evolution can either be seen as a meditative action: in walking simulators where the character's development is more a feeling than a fact. Or it can take place through the player's interactions and decisions. One genre that succeeded in combining narration, adventure and reflection is the puzzle-game genre. On one hand, the power of puzzle games is that they rely on the use of items to tell stories: also called environmental storytelling. On the other hand, resolving puzzles can be seen as a reward for the player's reflection allowing the character to go further in the adventure. It is common to see puzzle

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[66] "The Fellow That Goes Alone – Andrewchapman.Info," December 16, 2020, https://andrewchapman.info/the-fellow-that-goes-alone/.

[67] De Iulio, "Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media."

games combined with the idea of escaping. Thus, puzzles can heavily be symbolic, especially when looking at them as the player's inner reflection around a key step of the narrative. As puzzles use items to tell stories, the symbolic use of objects in the representation of an existential concept becomes possible. As explained earlier, it exists artist like David Lynch that highlight the importance of objects finding as a symbol of the character's inner journey. Thus, puzzle games rely on the same idea of external objects leading to an internal reflection around the narrative.

### 3.3 Examples

In an adventure game like *Journey*[68], it is not expressed through words that the narrative relies on the trip of a lifetime. However, the place that takes the action of walking combined with the feeling of loneliness, gives the feeling that the adventure that is being lived is a personal and individual one. The way that the character's evolution is represented in the game can be seen through the length of the scarf that the protagonist is wearing. The scarf's size, which can be extended by collecting symbols inside the world, can also be understood as the experience that gains the player and the character throughout the adventure. Those collectable symbols are often surrounded by flying creatures that the player can interact with. This social rewarding reduces the loneliness' feeling that can be



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[68] Journey, thatgamecompany, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, iOS, Microsoft Windows, Sony Computer Entertainment, 2012

sensed faced to the empty world that the game proposes. (Image[69]) However, the presence of the diver game's entities will always stay temporal. The game constantly reminds the player that it is through loneliness that the quest for identity can take place.

On another hand, solitude, in the dreamlike puzzle game *Inside*[70] is marked by the constant presence of enemies pushing the player to get more familiar with the game's commands and master the experience. Since the character is a young boy, learning the game feels like a way for the protagonist to learn how life is functioning. Like in *Journey*, the notion of life's evolution can also be understood through the game's continuity. However, the camera is placed on the side rather than behind the character, which accentuates the linearity of the game's development. Therefore, the player enjoys less freedom of navigation, giving a darker tone to the character's destiny. The fear that the player senses when starting the game slowly attenuates when gaining a better understanding of the world. Thus, it is through the player's feelings that the character evolves as they are responsible for the avatar's movements. In addition, the fact that the game's protagonist doesn't present any face, or any name amplifies the feeling that his presence is mainly a "bridge" between the game and the player. The importance is not given to the character himself but to the visualization of the gameplay through this figure. In opposite to narrative games like *Life Is Strange* [71] and *Gone Home* [72] that play an important role in the exploration of the character's mind and feelings through space, the information that the players collect in *Inside* are not directly concerning the character himself but the world in which he finds himself. There is a form of character's depersonalization. In the two narrative games (*Life Is Strange* and *Gone Home*), the player gets to know the characters by exploring the world. It is through the player's commands that the story unfolds. Therefore, the character's evolution in those two games takes place rather through the information that the player gets about the protagonist than in the adventure games, *Journey* and *Inside* which depersonalized the information found in the world. Since those two adventure games are speechless, the story they propose invites in a bigger personal

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[69] Collecting symbols in the desert, Journey, thatgamecompany,, 2012"Glowing Symbols," Journey Wiki, accessed November 14, 2023, https://journey-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Glowing_symbols.,

[70] Inside, Playdead, 2016

[71] Life is Strange 1, Dontnod Entertainment, Deck Nine, PlayStation 4, Android, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, Playstation 3, MaxOS. Xbox 360, Xbox Series, GeForceNow, Linux, Microsoft Windows, IOS, Google Stadia, Square Enix, 2015

[72] Gone Home, Fullbright, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, 2013

interpretation than in the narrative games, *Life Is Strange* and *Gone Home*. Therefore, the way we can understand the character's evolution is subjective to the player. That can also be observed through the ending that those two speechless games propose. The narrative is not clearly explained. The character's development is implied rather than explicit.

## 4. Representing the inner journey in medias

### 4.1 The manifestation of the mind through dreams, unconscious and surrealism

Since the topic of the character's inner journey is often a hidden concept as part of a story, artists use diver techniques of representation to make the notion understandable. While literature utilizes words and descriptions to express the narrative; cinema, games, and paintings mainly rely on visual techniques to represent this inner exploration. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that understanding a work as being the representation of such a concept is often the result of an audience's interpretation. (wanted by the artist or not) Exploring the unconscious, dreams, and the manifestation of the mind in all its form has been an importance source of inspiration for artists of old and modern times. The fact that it exists hidden aspects of the mind mean that more information that those found in the consciousness can be exploited by artists for the creation of even more astonishing works. Although it would be too complex to define the unconscious' concept in its whole, giving a definition of the term stays important in the chapter's comprehension. When talking about unconscious, it is common to see the name of Sigmund Freud being quoted as he has played a major role in psychoanalysis and the understanding of the unconscious mind. The Austrian psychologist defines the unconscious as containing thoughts, feelings, desires and memories not directly accessible through the conscious level. Freud also points out that the unconscious contains repressed feelings and memories. It is directly linked to the act of dreaming which, in his opinion, also reveal hidden desires and unresolved conflicts.[73] Using those themes in art was the main interest of the Surrealists. The movement, founded in 1924 by the French poet André Breton has been defined by the latter as being a:

"Pure psychic automatism, by which one intends to express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the

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[73] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. (Abraham Arden) Brill, 2021, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/66048.

real functioning of the mind. Dictation by thought, in the absence of control exercised by reason, and beyond any aesthetic or moral preoccupation." [74]

More than being an artistic movement, surrealism was a movement of rebellion against bourgeois society and the logical way of thinking that dominates the modern world. André Breton highlights the importance of dreams as the free exploration of the impossible. The reconciliation between reality and dreams give what he calls: a "surreality"

Exploring dreams has also heavily inspired the work of the Italian painter Salvador Dali who remains one of the most popular surrealist artists. He believed in the creativity that was occurring in moments of sleep and searched for ways to extend this state throughout the day. Among other techniques that surrealist artists were using to access the unconscious, Dali was naturally putting himself in a paranoiac state, also called: "The paranoic-critical method" [75] causing himself hallucinations and deformation of reality that he would capture in his paintings. (Image[76])



In connection to the character's inner journey, it is interesting to observe that artists like Dali and other surrealists were searching for ways to visualize their inner world.

As surrealists were passionate about the continuation of dreams and the evolution of their

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[74] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1969).

[75] "Surrealism - Salvador Dalí," accessed November 14, 2023, https://figueras.weebly.com/surrealism.html.

[76] Salvador Dali, Suburbs of the "paranoiac-critical town", 1935, Oil on wood panel, 46x66cm, Italy accessed November 14, 2023, https://www.salvador-dali.org/en/artwork/catalogue-raisonne-paintings/obra/434/suburbs-of-the-paranoiac-critical-town.

unconscious state, it is possible to see their works as a form of mind's journey. In addition to that, dreams are a collection of images and symbols that evolve and fragment throughout sleep. The deformation of personal images, thus striking for the dreamer, occurring in time is also what fascinates artists that tend to capture it in their work. Luis Buñuel, Italian surrealist filmmaker explains in his autobiography that the film *Un Chien Andalou*[77] was based on a dream that he and Dali had[78]. The movie presents a fragmented structure and the association of images that come from different realities. It is indeed those different characteristics which are representative of the unconscious mind that those artists tend to reproduce. In addition, the passing from radically different sequences as a form of traveling for the character is typically of a dreamlike representation. The association of unidentical sequences are often composed of familiar and unfamiliar elements. The smallest details of a dream might be remembered while the bigger picture of it remains blurry. This phenomenon results of a feeling of near and fare. As if the drawn universe was palpable and at the same time inaccessible. There is therefore a form of mystery that is emerging from this "surreality".

It is often the quest of the characters who are part of those "surworlds" to discover what lies underneath it. Since the protagonist is generally trapped in their own dreams, it is therefore their personal world that they get to know. Dreaming and digging into the unconscious can also be seen as escaping reality. Pushing the limits of the possible means that all kinds of extraordinary events can happen as part of the mind. Therefore, the dreamer creates their own adventure that is being represented on screen. It is the case in the movie *Brazil*[79], mentioned in the third chapter. The protagonist dreams in order to escape the totalitarian system in which he is. Interestingly enough, it is the act of dreaming that gives him the motivation to rebel against this world. Thus, the act of dreaming can be a way to explore unknown territories of the mind. In more romanticized cases, it is also seen as an external motivation for the character to switch from a static to an active state of search in their true selves.

As surrealists and other artists draw their inspirations from their own dreams and unconscious, it would be interesting to ask ourselves if the presented works are in fact not the representation of their own inner journey?

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[77] Un Chien Andalou, Luis Buñuel, France 1929

[78] Luis Bunuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Bunuel* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013).

[79] Brazil, Terry Gilliam, UK 1995

As much as surrealists do, it exists other forms of personal storytelling which do not separate the protagonist from the author.

## 4.2 Exploration of the lyrical form and the psychological fiction

The genre of the lyrical film also known under diver names: "film poem", "film poetry", "cinepoem" has been firstly mentioned around the 1920s. Among the diver definitions of what poetry is, one aspect remains important: the central place of the authors in their writings. Therefore, the association of cinema and poetry is a way for filmmakers to freely focus their creations on the expression of their own emotions and points of view. In other terms, it is a way to detach themselves from the rules that the cinema industry has imposed. Rules that hindered the creation of pure and personal movies: "Filmmaking became part of an industry almost immediately after its conception. Within this environment, avant-garde filmmakers have to reclaim their status as artists. In this respect, they became 'film-poets'[…]" [80] Even if there was a common need coming from film-poets to claim cinema as a pure form of art, different points of view exist around the question of what film poetry is and should be. Only an overview of the movement will be covered in this thesis. Another interesting aspect of the genre is that some of the film-poets were criticizing the place of narration in cinema and the way it is communicated. Indeed, poetic cinema doesn't express a story through words but through visuals. It is the images that illustrate the emotions. Just as in poetry, the idea of isolating and focusing on specific elements was one way to compose the image and amplify the importance of visuals. As with rhythm, which is a non-negligible aspect of poetry, it was integrated in the film form and editing. For example, in the images speed, like in the movie *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* [81] by Stan Brakhage, important figure of experimental movies in the twenty Century. With the use of flashes and lines, Brankhage wanted to illustrate more intensively the sensation of childbirth, a theme that is often present in his movies. It is also in the film cuttings that the concept of rhythm is being integrated. It is current in film poetry to see a certain number of shots mounted together. As the narration lies upon the images, it is this final composition that allows the filmmakers to tell a story.

[80] "Film Poetry: A Historical Analysis by Fil Ieropoulos," *Poetry Film Live* (blog), accessed November 14, 2023, https://poetryfilmlive.com/film-poetry-a-historical-analysis/.

[81] Thigh Line Lyre Triangular, Stan Brakhage, Unknown place 1961

However, the film poetry genre is not always based on narration or the subjective expression of emotions. Man Ray, American painter and photograph who briefly got involved in cinema, proposes a genre of film poetry based on fragmentation.

In a few of his movies, it is possible to observe shots that come from different reality, put together in one film. The movement and fragmentation of his movies give a feeling of traveling and dreaming. Man Ray even borrowed the notion of automatism, which was a technique used by surrealists as a pure and direct expression of thoughts wrote on a paper. Improvisation and direct capture of reality was what made his films unique in their genre. Man Ray has introduced a more spontaneous way of expression in cinema, which is reminiscent of what surrealists believed in. (Image[82])



During the early period of film poetry, it is common to see movies that borrowed the idea of poetry in its whole, without separating the different forms of it. However, beyond the importance of rhythm and the use of images to express feelings, what the lyrical form allows is the pure and free expression of emotions without per say focusing on the other aspects of poetry, that were present in early film poetry. Indeed, a lyric poem can be defined as: "a short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker" [83] Lyric

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[82] L'Étoile de mer, Man Ray, France 1928, *MUBI*, accessed November 14, 2023, https://mubi.com/de/de/films/letoile-de-mer.

[83] Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, Dana, An Introduction to Poetry, New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1994, pg 6

poetry also finds its name in the combination between music (Lyre) and words. Therefore, artists that focused on the lyrical aspect of poetry as part of cinema were more interested in the free manipulation of images than following specific rules. Hans Richer, German experimental filmmaker was the first to talk about the lyrical aspect in cinema. He stresses the importance of the process in the movies' creation than the importance of the result:

"One of the main characteristics of film poetry, I would say, is the way the film poem is made. (…) Whereas the commercial film has to be laid out ironclad from the beginning to the end, has to follow the script to the point, (…) the film poem follows a different process. There is a general direction, there is an aim, a meaning, a mood in the process of production. But all that grows is not foreseen. It is a result of the creative process itself." [84]

The evolution of film production, that goes hand in hand with the evolution of the artist's thoughts and emotions, is what makes film poetry an art. It is in fact the integration and the visibility of this evolution that makes it an art. What can be seen on screen is the inner exploration and journey of the artist.

Yet, it exists another form of narratology that also focuses on inner exploration and emotions. The genre of psychological fiction finds its roots in the form of psychological realism in novels that emerged between the eighteen and nineteen Century. On one hand, the apparition of photography pushed authors to integrate more realistic and authentic characters into their works. Especially the relation between those figures and society. On the other hand, the exploration of scientists in the topic of psychology developed the importance of the mind in society. The discoveries of Sigmund Freud in the domain of psychoanalysis during that time largely influenced literature. It is with Freud and the so called "Psychoanalytic literary criticism" [85] that the connection between literature and psyche is being drawn. The goal of the concept is to analyses the fictional characters present in a work as being influenced by the author's mind. (desires, fears, own experiences) Therefore, drawing a line between the author's mind and the fictional characters reinforced the idea of realism that is part of psychological realistic texts. The concept of "Psychoanalytic literary criticism" shows limits and has also been criticized.

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[84] Real source Unknown, "Film Poetry."

[85] "Psychoanalytic Criticism," accessed November 15, 2023, https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/psycho.crit.html.

However, the debate won't be covered here.

What the form of psychological realism allows is the internal exploration of the characters part of a story. The focus is not only on the external aspects of their life but goes in-depth into their psyche which makes the genre realistic and believable. Indeed, one important aspect of it is the possibility for the readers to identify with the characters. It is one reason why those figures also show common patterns with everyday people's mind. As described earlier, the connection between humans and society plays an important role in the construction of those stories. There is often a strong relation between the character and the society as part of their identities' research. Thus, as much as presenting characters who show relatable elements for the greater numbers, it remains important to draw emotionally unique figures. This uniqueness often comes from the author's point of view.

Beside the realism part of psychological stories, the genre is also called "fictional" because the characters that are presented in a narrative are often invented by the author. Indeed, detaching the character from the authors allow them to create a fictional setting helping the audience in the comprehension of a specific topic or theme.

In cinema, the psychological fiction has also been largely explored by filmmakers like with: David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick, Bong Joon-ho, Roman Polanski and many more. The interesting aspects of psychological fiction in cinema is the visualization of the characters psyche through images. The emphasis on one specific aspect of the character's psychology allows the exploration of a theme than can be followed in the entire "mise-en-scène"[86] of



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[86] Arrangement of scenery

the movie. (Image[87])

In comparison to the lyrical form or film poetry, psychological fictions often show a stricter linearity in the stories' development. While both genres are focusing on the human mind (more or less detached from the filmmaker), it is possible to observe more complex characters and sceneries in the psychological fiction. However, the lyrical form has pushed the limit of emotional expression through movies, showing that cinema is a non-negotiable art form.

## 4.3 How the previous forms of art can be found in video games

What has been observed with the psychological fiction, the lyrical form and the surrealism movement, is a need to explore and represent the mysteries of the mind through art and storytelling. Some artists would either separate themselves from the characters present in their work in order to express personal emotions. Others would use more spontaneous techniques to explore and represent hidden aspects of their inner self.

It is also possible to observe in the video game industry, a raise of more experimental oeuvres that touch upon more personal and controversial topic. Those games often belong to the category of "indie games"[88]. Since indie studios are generally independent from the support of large publishers and are constituted by a smaller developments' teams, developers enjoy a bigger freedom of creation. Therefore, indie games often contain experimental structure, innovative gameplay and visuals that detach themselves from reality to illustrate a topic in a more authentic manner. In addition, those games often propose a type of narration more open for interpretation than in many Triple-A games [89]

As mentioned in early chapters, the artists who explored the mind's theme were using spontaneous creation's techniques in order to "break the wall" between the pure expression of emotions and their works' final result.

However, video games are products that are built. They require a certain period during which the game's objects must be created. One could argue that painting also asks for the creation of objects on a canvas. But the interactivity that is part of games demands a

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[87] Rehearsing scene, Venus in Furs, Roman Polanski, Germany 2013 Carole, Critikat, November 12, 2013, https://www.critikat.com/actualite-cine/critique/la-venus-a-la-fourrure-2/.

[88] Short for independent video games

[89] High budget games

development time during which coding, which requires a logical way of thinking, must be integrated. In addition, communicating a gameplay requires games to integrate elements that players can relate to. In addition, games couldn't be navigable if they were missing a form of logic that belongs to the reality that most players are familiar with. Thus, the idea of capturing the pure emotional essence with the use of spontaneous artistic methods is a limited concept in game developments.

It is however possible to observe existing video games that managed to integrate some elements relatable to surrealism, dreams, lyrical works, and psychological fictions. Most of the games that will be mentioned in this chapter present elements that push the players to subjectively interpret the narrative. It is indeed common to observe that works which explore the mind's theme invite the audience to make their own understanding of what is presented to them. The mystery and introspection which comes out of this decision is indeed more aligned with the exploration of the unconscious. In addition, presenting a work which is open for interpretation allows designers to rely on visuals to tell a story. Dreams also present strong elements or symbols that speak for themselves. This powerful use of elements can be found in surrealism but also speechless kind of games.

For example, in the horror- puzzle game *Inside*[90], it is possible to observe the extrapolation of certain objects bringing a surreal flavor to the whole experience. (Image[91])

[90] Inside, Playdead, Nintendo Switch, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, iOS, Xbox One, 2016

[91] Part Three: The City, Inside, Playdead, 2016, Digital Trends, July 8, 2016, https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/inside-review/.

Playing with the objects' size helps in highlighting important aspects of the narrative and attracts the player's attention. It is the case with the gigantic cameras present in the game's part three. More than drawing a surreal picture, extrapolating the camera's size amplifies the fear that the character and the player feel in front of it.

This technique of size extrapolation will be used all over the game as a way to show the character's smallness face to the world in which he is. The same technique is being used in the game *Little Nightmares*[92], which, as mentioned earlier, portraits a character trapped in their childhood nightmares. The size's contrast between the character and the world in those two games, as well as the isolation of certain objects, reminds of the near and fare feeling occurring when dreaming[93]. This same sensation seems to be represented in the game *Limbo*[94], the first work of the studio *Playdead*. The blurriness and fogginess of the whole scene associated with the silhouettes' sharpness reminds of the dreamlike movie *La femme qui se poudre* [95] by the experimental artist Patrick Bokanowski. (Image[96])



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[92] Littles Nightmares, Tarsier Studios, Bandai Namco Entertainment, Android, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows, iOS, GeForce Now, Google Stadia, 2021

[93] See chapter: The manifestation of the mind through dreams, unconscious and surrealism for more details

[94] Limbo, Playdead, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Windows, OSX, Linux, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, Nintendo, Switch, iOS, Android, Microsoft Game Studios, 2010

[95] La femme qui se poudre, Patrick Bokanowski, France 1972

[96] The character walking in a dreamlike environment, La femme qui se poudre, Patrick Bokanowski, France 1972, "Vídeo Dailymotion," Dailymotion, January 24, 2020, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7qzzps.

Both oeuvres present a feeling of familiarity and peacefulness mixed with a strange feeling that certain sequences cause.

The linearity of diver dreamlike and surreal games helps in introducing the player to a world which evolves into something more and more uncanny. When looking at the two puzzle games *Inside* and *Little Nightmares*, they both present an important raise of tension caused by the discovery of a universe which is increasingly threatening. The player slowly drives away from elements that they are familiar with. The same phenomenon can be experienced when the mind gradually enters an unconscious state. However, even if the different games mentioned present some dreamlike and surreal scenes, it is possible to find a certain logic in the gameplay and the linear structure they propose.

Nevertheless, it exists games that are less focused on the gameplay itself allowing a bigger freedom in their structure. As explained, an important aspect of film poems is rhythm. In video games, rhythm is differently integrated than in cinema since the player is master of the camera. Therefore, beside cinematics[97], games cannot present the same concept of cuts as in movies. However, rhythm can be observed in space. In other terms, what creates rhythm is the movement of objects around the player. This aspect of gaming can highly be observed in the interactive experience *Kid A Exhibition*[98].



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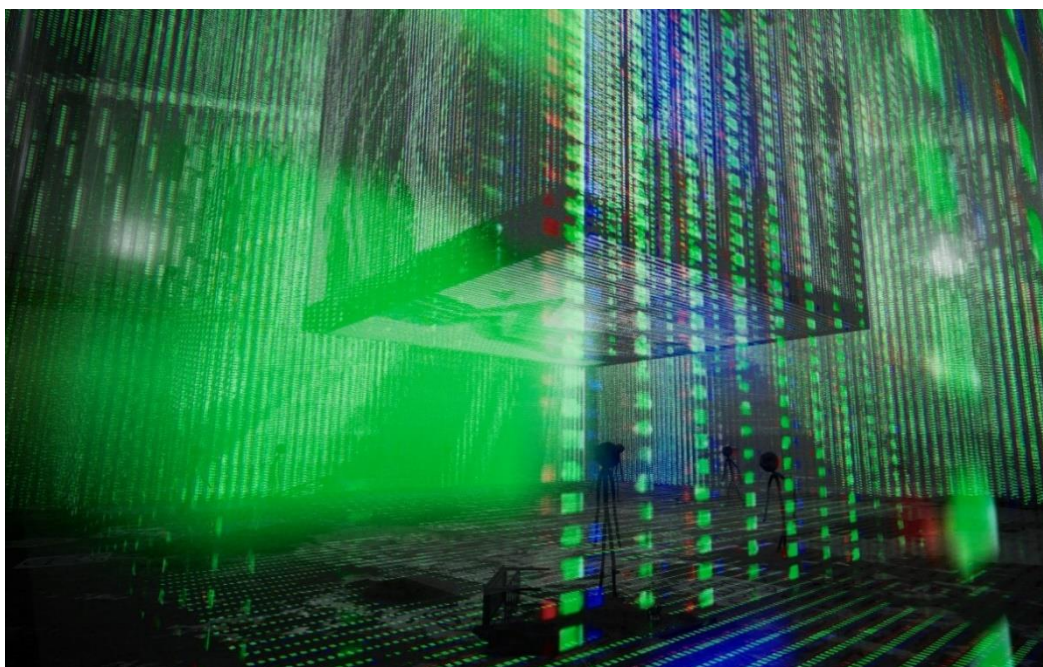
[97] Sequence in a video game which is not interactive and help in the narrative's comprehension

[98] Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, PlayStation 5, Microsoft Windows, macOS, Epic Games, 2021

It is the contemplation of objects moving in a synchronized manner that brings a poetical and emotional aspect to the game.  (Image[99])

More than that, music is one of the main components of the game which helps in the concept's integration. *Kid A exhibition* can also be compared to a lyrical movie since the game's theme is nothing more than the exploration of the artistic work of the English band, Radiohead. More than that, the experience doesn't present any hero. The game is played in the first person (sometimes switching to a third person) but the notion of protagonist doesn't really exist. The moving elements existing in space invite the players to contemplate the universe in which they find themselves.

Contemplation is also an important theme in the exploration game *Journey*. The long walks that the game offers give the time to simply observe the omnipresent landscapes. This pure observation of life represents an important aspect of poetical works in general. Andrey Tarkovsky, soviet film poet wrote: "The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of an object."[100] The same phenomenon can be observed in video games. It is through the manipulation of space that game designers succeed in representing this unique point of view.


## 5. Spatial Design Techniques in games

### 5.1 Influencing the player and the viewer with the use of colors, lights and architecture

The last part of this thesis is dedicated to an introduction of more applied and technical notions of the topic. As mentioned in the first chapter**,** game spaces present the particularity to be freely manipulated by game designers. Indeed, the fact that the objects and elements that compose them are (re)built to virtually exist, allow a certain independence in the way they function.

Building virtual worlds has been criticized as not being authentic space. That has even highlighted the possibility that game spaces might not be seen as real spaces at all. However, this freedom of creation has resulted in worlds that present highly immersive

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[99] Pixel Warehouse, Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, 2021

[100] Andrey Tarkovsky and Kitty Hunter-Blair, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (University of Texas Press, 1989).

power and the possibility to transform a theme or concept to something that feels alive. Even if game worlds function in a unique manner, game designers still borrow techniques of spaces organization that exist in the real and physical world. The reason behind is that the design techniques that have been discovered by artists and architectures to influence how someone feels in a certain space or face to certain images are still valid in the video game spaces' design. Video games are also images, interactive ones. Thus, understanding the basics of image compositions helps in influencing how players will use the game and react face to it. Dan John Cox, lead environment artist at the American video games studio Blizzard Entertainment, explains that: "Environment artists must understand interior design…" because it "…is the bare bones basics fundamental understanding that we need to build off of" [101] He also adds that understanding space composition is important to design 3-D games because the particularity of those spaces is that they are navigable, in the difference of movies. Dan John Cox continues his talk covering different notions of interior design principles like: Order, enrichment, and expression. Beside the relevance of those notions in guiding the player, what can be understood from it is that manipulating spaces by following those principles is needed to visually support the game's theme and narrative. And thus, convey specific emotions and information to the players.

Since centuries, colors and lights have been used by artists and painters as a technique of emotional expression.

The Post-Impressionist's period of paintings that started around the 1880s stressed the importance of colors as a way to express emotions. "Instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I see before me, I make more arbitrary use of color to express myself more forcefully."[102] wrote Vincent Van Gogh, one of the first post-impressionist artists of his time. (Image[103])

[101] Interior Design and Environment Art: Mastering Space, Mastering Place, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWXsmnlmADc.

[102] "663 (663, 520): To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Saturday, 18 August 1888. - Vincent van Gogh Letters," accessed November 15, 2023, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let663/letter.html#translation.

[103] Starry Night Over the Rhône, Vincent Van Gogh, 1888, Oil on canvas, 72.5x92cm, Unknown place in *Wikipedia*, June 19, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Starry_Night_Over_the_Rh%C3%B4ne&oldid=1160874168.

The use of colors has also largely been used in theater and movies to highlight certain aspects of the story or indicate rather the scene is happening during the day or the night. In the silent horror movie, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*[104], all the daylight scenes are tinted in a soft orange while all the night sequences are blue. More than being a time indicator, this opposition of colors also marks the different emotions that the spectator might feel. It is during the night scenes that the film's crimes take place. Thus, blue indicates a certain tension as part of the movie. More than inviting the spectator to feel certain emotions, colors can also help in dragging the spectator into the character's mind. This opposition between orange and blue has rather been used by Michel Gondry in the movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*[105] as a way to show the protagonists' feelings. On the one hand, blue marks the sadness of Joel, the male protagonist, while orange indicates the joy that Clementine brings in the latter's life. Since colors have the capacity to convey emotions and communicate specific information like time, character's feelings and story's themes, their use has largely been integrated in the creation of video games worlds. More than being an aesthetical choice, colors can benefit the gameplay and help attract the player's eyes to important items.

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[104] The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Robert Wiene, Germany 1920

[105] Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Michel Gondry, Germany 2004

The same double utilization can be observed with lighting. While it is possible to observe a dramaturgical use of light, it also represents a key element in the player's guidance and the gameplay. The duality between light and dark has largely been used in a symbolic manner in architecture, paintings, theater and later on, cinema. Its primal utilization was to represent the divine through art. The early symbolic use of light can be observed in ancient Egyptian art. In one of the Abu Simbel temples' rooms[106], the sunlight hits the main god statues bringing attention to their importance. As much as religious works were using light as a representation of the spiritual and the mind's enlightenment, important references of the sky can be observed in surrealists' paintings. Therefore, light can be understood as a symbolic mind's representation in diverse art forms.

Lighting as much as spatial organization, the use of a specific color palette and any other items appearing on an image can be understood as "mise-en-scène". In French, mise-en-scène means "setting the stage". The term originally comes from theater as being: "[…] the arrangement of scenery and stage properties in a play." [107] In cinema it can however refers to: "[…] everything in front of the camera, including the set design, lighting, and actors." Mise-en-scène is crucial in world building, in supporting the artist's vision and telling stories. The image's composition allows to communicate and visualize important information. And that, without the use of words. Even though mise-en-scène is mainly utilized in theater and cinema, its use can however be found in video games too.

## 5.2 How spatial design elements contribute in representing the character's inner journey

Specific games have been mentioned in this thesis as they show some aspects in their structure, design and gameplay elements that could remind of the representation of the character's psyche. The constant design and narration's evolution of those games may suggest that more than being the visualization of the protagonist's mind, it is also the one of their inner journeys.

As mentioned earlier, mise-en-scène in cinema, theater and also in video games allows the communication of key elements and can reveal information that goes beyond words. Its use

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[106] Egyptian historical site presenting diver god temples constructed under the reign of Ramesses II

[107] "Mise-En-Scene and the Directors the Mastered It," StudioBinder, September 13, 2020, https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/mise-en-scene/.

also benefits the creation of a specific atmosphere also understood as "tone"[108] The proposed atmosphere will, in turn, result of what can be called: "the mood" of a movie or a game. It refers to what the audience feels when looking at a specific image. The coherence between the audience's feelings and the artist's intentions is important as it might result in a better comprehension of the proposed story and concept.

Throughout the entire game of *Inside*[109], the players live the fear that the character must feel by being stuck in the obscure world that the game presents. While the beginning of the experience proposes what can be called "a naturalistic mise-en-scene"[110], the grow of tension presents throughout the entire experience is followed by the apparition of elements that go beyond reality. In the second building that the player penetrates, a helmet is hanging in the middle of the room. More than connecting two separated realities and time periods together, it brings to the surface an important theme of the game: *mind control.* (Image[111])



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[108] The attitude that an artist has towards the subject matter of something they create, "What Is Tone in Storytelling — A Writer's Guide," StudioBinder, December 5, 2021, https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-tone-in-literature-definition/.

[109] Inside, Playdead, Nintendo Switch, Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, iOS, Xbox One, 2016

[110] A realistic style that appears to correspond to the real world and is recognizable to viewers, "Untitled Document," accessed November 15, 2023, https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~sflores/FilmExperienceCh2.html.

[111] Part Two: The Farm, Inside, Playdead, 2016, Max Parker, "Inside Puzzle Guide and Walkthrough," *Polygon* (blog), July 1, 2016, https://www.polygon.com/inside/2016/7/1/12074742/puzzle-help-solutions.

The discovery of a more and more unreal world will only be able to take place through the evolution of the character's journey that can be compared to a dreamlike exploration mentioned in early chapters.

Tension raising is also visualized in the architecture. Indeed, the game starts outside in a forest. After having passed a few imposing corn fields, the player is suddenly invited to enter a dark and narrow part of a vast and empty room. The name *Inside* suddenly takes all its importance. The game seems to be, indeed, rhythmized by the entering and exiting of diverse spaces giving a symbolic importance to doors and passages in general. The theme of confinement and introspection is all the more highlighted as most of the surreal elements are found indoors. The deepness of *Inside*'s world can also be experienced as the game brings the player into more and more enclosed spaces, until abysses are reached. While the character always looks as if he was running away (since he is not walking but running), the game, however, invites the player to take the time to explore its mysteries. Indeed, the underwater sequences give the possibility for the players to move up down and left right, which gives a bigger feeling of freedom than when moving on the ground. Thus, the constant oscillation between fear and curiosity of exploration can be compared to the typical feelings of an inner journey. Freedom, which is a repressed topic in *Inside* is however omnipresent in the game *Journey*[112]. In opposite to enclosed spaces, *Journey* mainly proposes vast outdoor scenes. The endless deserts that are part of the game give a feeling of liberation to the players. As if the character was free of any material attachment. The protagonist's research of their "true" identity is represented by the different ruins and temples present in the desert. It is also through the discovery of certain buildings and murals that the character seems to learn more about their origins. Moreover, the game's environments will gradually be populated by buildings, as if the character was slowly aware of their roots. Just like in *Inside*, tension is also represented through more enclosed and darker spaces. During the confrontation of the main game's enemy, *Journey*'s protagonist must go down to a cave, literally done by a long fall, insisting on the tone's change.

In the game, each step is represented by a specific color. The first steps, also understood as the inner adventure's starting point, are represented by a warm and joyful color palette. In contrast to it, the sequences of enemies' confrontation, also seen as inner conflicts, are

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[112] Journey, thatgamecompany, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, iOS, Microsoft Windows, Sony Computer Entertainment, 2012

marked by cold and dark tones. Finally, the game's end shows white and clear colors, comparable to abbey or churches' ceiling paintings of heaven. This last step indeed evokes the character's rebirth. (Image[113])



The same idea of color code can be found in the experience: *Kid A Amnesia* [114] where each rooms have a specific theme and present diverse works of the band Radiohead. Through the multiple locations present in the game, the player is invited to enter into the evolution of the band's creativity. The experience proposes abstract elements invoking inexplicable feelings. On the other hand, the players can find objects that seem to belong to the band's routine, inviting the users to enter their everyday life. The whole experience shows surreal scenes that evoke the exploration of Radiohead's mind. In the room called "Green Phosphor", the connection between realistic objects and the "green dots matrix" walls on which thoughts and questions are written, particularly evoke a psyche's theme. In addition to the whole game's mise-en-scène, the map is constructed in a labyrinth manner.

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[113] Color palette of the game, Journey, thatgamecompany, 2012, "The Save Room Mini Bar," Tumblr, *Tumblr* (blog), accessed November 15, 2023, https://saveroomminibar.tumblr.com/post/36592414137/journey.

[114] Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, PlayStation 5, Microsoft Windows, macOS, Epic Games, 2021

(Image[115])
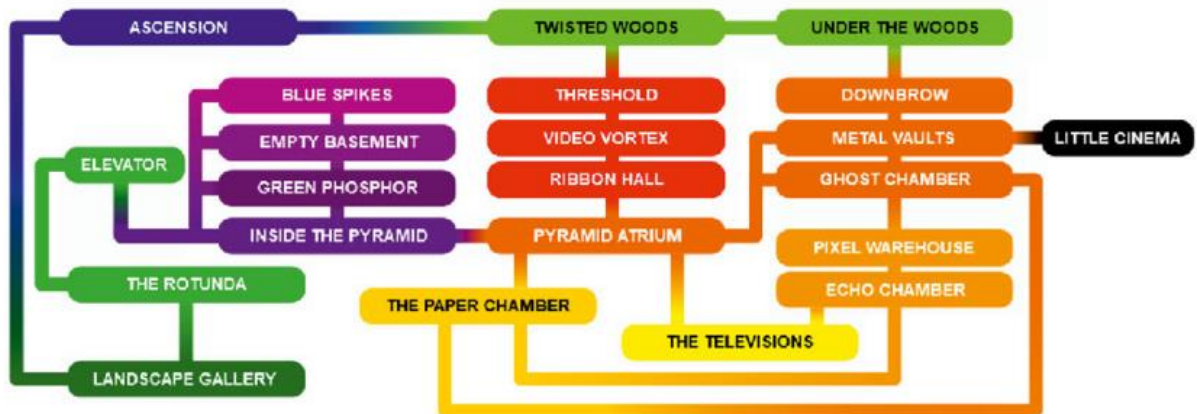


The non-linear and continuous space of the game gives the feeling of being lost in an endless world. In addition to the game's structure, the number of objects that seem to come from different realities evokes madness. The same madness' representation can be compared to the psychological horror movie *Shining*[116] (Image[117])



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[115] The game's map, Kid A Exhibition, Namethemachine, Arbitrarily Good Productions, 2021, ResearchGate, accessed November 15, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-map-of-the-KID-A-MNESIA-EXHIBITION_fig1_365908414.

[116] Shinning, (The Shinning), Stanley Kubrick, Germany 1980

[117] Jack Torrance looking at the labyrinth, Shinning, (The Shinning), Stanley Kubrick, 1980, Anya Stanley, /Film, January 1, 2023, https://www.slashfilm.com/1149932/the-shinings-hedge-maze-sets-were-just-as-disorienting-behind-the-scenes/.

In the film, it is also possible to notice the use of labyrinth elements to, on one hand, portrait the main character's madness and on the other one, show the family's imprisonment in the hotel.

In opposite to *Inside* and *Journey* that rely on linearity to show the evolution of the game and the character, *Kid A Exhibition* uses a more open structure, more aligned with the way creativity might functions in the mind. However, there are games that, even if they are linear, proposes a structure that feels fragmented, comparable to a dreamlike experience. *Life Is Strange* [118]is the story of Max Caulfield who, with the use of her powers, can rewind time and thus, change her city's faith. Throughout the whole game, the players bounce between present, past and future. Therefore, familiar scenes and places re-appear in a more and more distorted way as Max's powers show some limits. The whole game seems to follow a structure comparable to how memory functions as the players enter pictures taken by the character. Indeed, pictures in the game represent capturing time and thus remembering important people and moments. In addition, the fact that none of the other characters present in the game seem to live the strange experience that Max is experiencing, it induces that the player is invited in Max's inner adventure. This sensation results in a feeling of isolation.

Loneliness, which plays an important role in the character's inner journey, is also something that can be experienced as part of the other quoted games. In all those experiences, the main character is left to their own devices face to the decisions that must be taken. On one hand, it evokes that the adventure is a personal one, on the other hand, it immerses the player into an introspective state in which the main character already is. There are many other details belonging to those games' spaces that could be analyzed as being the representation of the character's inner journey. Sound Design, an important aspect of video games, hasn't been covered in this thesis. However, it plays an important role in immersing the players in different atmospheres. Nevertheless, the goal of this writing is to invite a bigger audience to look at video game spaces as active and alive entities, perpetually evolving throughout an experience.

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[118] Life is Strange 1, Dontnod Entertainment, Deck Nine, PlayStation 4, Android, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, Playstation 3, MaxOS. Xbox 360, Xbox Series, GeForceNow, Linux, Microsoft Windows, IOS, Google Stadia, Square Enix, 2015

# 6. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, defining and exploring the concept of video games spaces helped in understanding its complexity and therefore its capacity in encapsulating rich narratives, key component of the character's inner journey. In addition, nowadays' games offer more and more freedom in spaces' exploration resulting in an important feeling of immersion. The significance of immersion has in fact been explored, to show how it serves as a bridge for players to connect with the virtual worlds presented to them.

The concept of a character's inner journey emerged as a central theme, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of characters within the gaming landscape. If the character's transformation is happening through the players' decisions or is predetermined by the narration, it is only through moving in space that the gameplay can be experienced. In addition, time and navigation are two interconnected concepts. It is only through time that internal change can take place. Therefore, the connection between a character's inner journey and video game spaces is non-negotiable.

Through the exploration of diver artistic movement like surrealism, lyrical form and psychological fiction, it has been shown that artists have always claimed their need in representing their emotions and inner self by pushing the limits of what was already existing in their time. The study of the unconscious resulting in dreams' representation has served many artists in a more in-depth understanding of their profonde transformation and desires. Drawing parallels between those other forms of media and video games proves the capacity of virtual spaces to represent deep psychological topics. However, it is only with the recent rise of Indie studios that the presence of those themes can be observed, proving the need to introduce more psychological subjects through digital experiences.

Like other artistic movements, video games also experience a turning point. Their spaces no longer only serve the gameplay but instead serve as a means of expression, tackling topics that resonate with the players on a personal level.

Furthermore, the integration of spatial design techniques in video games emerged as a powerful tool for conveying the character's inner journey. The use of colors, lights and architectures has on one hand the purpose of immersing the players into a specific mood and on another, revealing important information about the character's emotions. This spatial narrative design not only shapes the visual aesthetics of the game but also guide players through emotional landscapes that mirror the internal adventure of the characters

they control.

All in all, this thesis shows that video game spaces shouldn't only be considered as simple backgrounds but dynamic entities and active members of storytelling. By connecting the concept of the character's inner journey and other art forms, with the one of spatial design, it shows that video games push the boundaries of traditional narrative, offering immersive experiences capable of exploring the complex topic of human psyche.

The meeting between technology, narrative and design in video games opens new doors for artistic expression, offering more and more impactful experiences to a broader players' audience. It also shows that new definitions of video games should be taken into consideration, as its form is evolving into something new for the world. Just like film poets, game designers are also reinventing a new type of gaming that could be seen as a so called "lyrical genre of games."

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