SUSPENSE MECHANICS IN NARRATIVE VIDEO GAMES

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Abstract

We put forward a suitable analytical model for studying suspense in video games. This model is based on the analysis of perspective, focalization and the figure of the implied player, which is fundamental to understand the relationship between game, player and emotional effects. We critically review the previous research on point of view in films and video games with the aim of achieving a better understanding of audiovisual narration. The resulting model is a proposal for, in the first place, systematising the relationship between the player -considered here as a theoretical concept: the implied player- and the game. Once this is done, it allows us to study suspense in video games from a narrative perspective and leads us to the conclusion that in video games suspense is not related to a waiting situation –like in films- but to the effort of overcoming difficulties that we know from a previous play.

Keywords: *Suspense; point of view; perspective; focalization; implied player.*

INTRODUCTION

Our approach involves considering the player as an essential element of narrative development in video games. The analysis of gameplay must be central to the narrative analysis, in clear contrast to cinema. Even though the player is not the main creator or author of the game, her or his act of playing and experience also constitute the game. Therefore, this leads to a problem of theoretical scope regarding the narrative in video games. While novels or films are closed narrative discourses, regardless of their reading or viewing, and therefore can be analysed directly as texts –fixed cultural artefacts– video games pose an essential difficulty for such analysis: the volatility of any game played, which is lost once it has been played but, at the same time, constitutes the actual text of any video game. The player must be central to our narrative analysis of video games. Not the actual player who is playing a given game, but the player we will refer to as the implied player: the one who is playing implied games. Because our model is built upon this figure, we must begin addressing it and clarifying its relations with perspective and focalization. After that, we will be able to present a consistent model for analysing suspense mechanics in narrative video games.

IMPLIED PLAYER AND THE POINT OF VIEW

Focusing the narrative analysis of video games on the figure of the player means focusing it on the game action and gameplay. The gameplay connects the qualities of a video game with the player's actions. It's hard to define, since it refers at the same time to the rules, the interface and their combination in the hands of the player. The gameplay is the very action of playing, the creation of the narrative discourse by the player through the activation of the elements in the game, such as graphics and algorithms. According to E. Aarseth, gameplay is the actions, strategies and motivations of the player during her or his interaction with the game (Aarseth, 2003). Therefore, the gaming experience as a whole. In this regard, we must point that gameplay is a volatile element in the analysis of video games, and yet key to understanding its narrative structures. We cannot think about the player of the gameplay as a "real" player but as an ideal or model player, which in literary studies has been referred to as implied author and implied reader.

In the field of literary studies, the figure of the implied author and implied reader is well-established, from W. Booth (Booth, 1983, p. 428-430), S. Chatman (Chatman, 1978, p. 147-160), U. Eco (Eco, 1979, p. 50) or W. Iser (Iser, 1974). The implied author is the second self of the author and the one who picks the characteristics of the work, controls the narrative mechanism and expose the ideological proposal. The implied author knows that the story is an invention, but she or he acts as it is absolutely true. The implied author is the one who creates a narrator, who believes that everything in the story is happening or has happened. The implied reader represents the same figure but from the reception side. As the implied author, the implied reader knows that the story is an invention, but acts as it is true.

The figure of the implied author, largely used in literature, has been adapted to game studies. We found here several references to it. "In the computer game, the player establishes a concrete order of events in the course of playing the game. The player is responsible for creating the plot, in addition to the interpretative task" (Neitzel, 2005, p. 239). So Neitzel calls the player the "implied author". But we prefer to refer to her or him as the implied player, since she or he is not exactly the author of the videogame, or at least, not the main author. Aarseth also refers to the implied player, but only with reference to compliance with the rules established for the game (Aarseth, 2007), thereby limiting its scope in relation to the gameplay.

Our implied player combines part of the implied author and the implied reader figures in literature, in the sense that she or

he is an instigator of the narrative, on the creation side, whereas at the same time she or he is a consumer of that narrative, on the receiving side. The implied player is part agent, part viewer. In this sense, J. Murray defines agency as one of three fundamental pleasures of a multiform story, along with immersion and transformation. According to her, "agency is the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (Murray, 2017, p. 160).

It is not only interactivity, but also the players' motivated actions with consequences in the development of the game. This doesn't mean that the player would be the author of the game, although, for Murray, "authorship in electronic media is procedural. Procedural authorship means writing the rules by which the texts appears as well as writing the texts themselves. (...) The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities. In electronic narrative, the procedural author is like a choreographer who supplies the rhythms, the context, and the set of steps that will be performed. The interactor, whether as navigator, protagonist, explorer, or builder, makes use of this repertoire of possible steps and rhythms to improvise a particular dance among the many, many possible dances the author has enabled. We could perhaps say that the interactor is the author of a particular performance within an electronic story system, or the architect of a particular part of the virtual world, but we must distinguish this derivative authorship form the originating authorship of the system itself" (Murray, 2017, p. 187-8). For us, it is better to call this procedural author implied player, in order to distinguish between the player and the author of the video game, in the sense of the author who produces a remaining cultural object.

We call this figure implied in the sense that it is a reconstructed figure, based on the actual player and her or his second self. She or he knows that the story is not true but fictional, nevertheless she or he *make it look* or act *as if* everything were true, in line with the acceptance of a universe of experience –a narrative experience– where disbelief is suspended. It could be considered that, with the inclusion of the implied player in the analysis of video games, the figure of the narrator loses much of the explanatory value that it has in cinema, since many of their abilities, powers and functions would belong, in fact, to the implied player.

In literature, we refer to the implied author and the implied reader regarding the level of discourse, a key concept in narratology, as it is the only category that can be directly analysed. But the equivalent of the novel's –or film's- discourse is hard to find in video games. Because, what is exactly the discourse in a video game? A recorded gameplay is the discourse? Can a unique gameplay be the complete discourse? Considering a given playing of a game as the full narrative of that video game would be a mistake, since the narrative, generated according to the rules of the game, must include all the possibilities of the game, which will only come to light through playing it several times. This was the first difficulty we encountered in our analysis of surprise and suspense in video games. For this reason, the figure of the implied player is so important, because it enables us to better understand the videogame as a text that is played and not simply as a given text. Our concept differs from that used by E. Aarseth, according to whom unplayed video games are aesthetic objects (Aarseth, 2007). We believe that the implied player needs to be included in the definition of the video game itself.

The narrative discourse, which is the result of the gameplay, is, therefore, the result of the action of an implied player, and not of the specific action of a specific player in a specific game. The user action in the game refers to the ability to shape events and not to a specific alteration of them, –for example, the possibility of the user's time altering the time of events (in this regard, see (Eskelinen, 2004, p. 39))–. The ability to alter is contained in the rules, but the rules of a video game do not include user actions. We will refer to the set of rules and the act of playing as the implied game.

The narrative of a played game, created by the player upon completion, is a repertoire of patterns of action because it contains, at the same time, the played game and the rules. All played games that are recorded and therefore narrated for the purposes of analysis contain the rules that generate them. The narrative of a played game is the learning of a tactic, not only the narration of events. They are repertoires of patterns of action, that is, compendia that teach possible tactics.

So, for us, an implied game is the closest thing in video games to discourse in books and films. The narrative or narratives generated by the implied player, which show both the events and the rules, both the representations and the algorithms, are put into operation by virtue of the gameplay. Repertoires of schemas of action can be significant sets of games played, with all their significant diegetic variations, or, in addition, the record of the rules and the games played by the players in the narratives about the games. We must therefore consider the implied game to be a necessary theoretical figure in the study of video games.

SPACE ANALYSIS OF POINT OF VIEW: PERSPECTIVE

Since virtual space navigation is a key action in the generation of a video game narrative (see (Ryan, 2004) (Jenkins, 2004)), we must address it in order to understand how this mechanism works in terms of discourse generation. This will allow us to analyze the suspense in the discourse. According to G. King and T. Krzywinska (King & Krzywinska, 2006, pp. 115-116), gameplay can largely be analysed using the same formal elements as in film studies, as it operates similarly in both media. For cinematic videogames, two types of basic perspective are established, in the sense that they are showed through images and sounds: the first person perspective and third person perspective, plus the possibility of a combination of both. The first person perspective is equivalent to seeing through the eyes of the avatar and the third person perspective to seeing from a position slightly above the avatar, which is known in film theory as an over-the-shoulder shot. These two perspectives, according to King and Krzywinska, are directly linked to the subjective involvement of the player, in relation to formulas already used in film, such as in *Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery, 1947) and *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978).

These categories, in fact, are similar to those proposed by F. Jost and A. Gaudreault (Gaudreault & Jost, 1990, p. 141) for film studies. Ocularization and auricularization, as they call them, connect what the viewer sees and hears to what the character sees and hears.

A third type, not linked to any character, is also common in video games, although it is not considered by King and Krzywinska: the isometric graphical perspective or "God-like view from on high", also the standard side-scrolling of platform games and even the zenith fixed view of numerous arcade games are variations of the zero ocularization and auricularization in cinema. Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnana propose two types of perspective in their analysis of gaming space: the omni-present perspective and vagrant perspective (Aarseth, Smedstad, & Sunnana, 2003). The first represents an impersonal perspective and the second a personal perspective.

In this regard, we propose two types of narrative perspective for video games: the personal perspective, which can be in the first or third person, and the impersonal perspective where point of view cannot be attributed to any character or group of characters. In general, as the name suggests, first person shooter games, as found in *Doom* series (GT Interactive, Activision, Bethesda Softworks, 1993-2016), *Quake* series (GT Interactive, 1996-2007) or *Counter-Strike* (Valve Corporation, 1999), have a first person perspective. Adventure games such as the *Tomb Raider* series (Ubisoft, 1996-2015), *Assassin's Creed* series (Ubisoft, 2007-2015) or even *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010) and other kind of games as *The Walking Dead: The Game* series (Telltale Games, 2012-2013), *Grand Theft Auto* series (Rockstar

Games, 1997-2015) or *World of Warcraft* series (Blizzard Entertainment, 2005-2016) have third person perspective, and strategy games such as the *Civilization* series (MPS Labs, 1991-2014) or *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009-) have an impersonal perspective.

The study of perspective enables us to formally analyse the cinematic point of view of video games. As in cinema, the perspective is closely related to the staging. For example, classical cinema orientates the film space through highly standardised figures, such as the single point of view of the fixed camera –the sequence shot– or the respect for the continuity of spatial orientation despite the multiplicity of shots –transparent editing–. In video games, when using a personal perspective, the sequence shot is the most common. The viewing distance, in games using a personal perspective in the third-person, also affects the player's relationship with the character, and therefore with the diegetic universe. For example, the view in *Silent Hill 2* (Konami, 2003) is more closed -a medium shot- and less inclined than the view in *Castlevania: Lord of Shadows* (Konami, 2010), which, although it is also a sequence shot in the third person, is more open and more inclined.

Some games have the option of giving the player freedom to change the perspective and therefore focus on the events to come, such as imminent attacks, as in *Enter the Matrix* (Shiny Entertainmet, 2003) *or Heavy Rain,* which are in the third person, but give us the option of switching, momentarily, to the first person. This option works using a particular transparent editing, because it allows the player to cut the shot to quickly change the viewing angle. Sometimes, to avoid possible disorientation, a fast sweep is used, uncut, as in the "search" mode in *Silent Hill 2.* However, sequence shots in the first and third person perspectives are so greatly predominant that they have become a formal feature of video games in general, and of course of first-person shooter games. They even have become an influence in cinema. We can see in films such as *Elephant* (Sant, 2003), which evokes first-person shooter games, or in the sequence shots of the film *Doom* (Bartkowiak, 2005), which adapts the video game series of the same name.

As we have noted, the relationship between cinema and videogames is rich and complex. A. R. Galloway compares the subjective shot and montage in film history and in First-Person Shooters. His conclusion goes beyond the simple observation of the use of a single figure, the subjective shot or first-person perspective. Whereas in cinema the subjective shot has been used mainly to show effects such as alienation, disorientation or distorted perception, and is an unusual feature, in the specific genre of the first-person shooter this is the perspective that is mostly used. "Where film uses the subjective shot to represent a problem with identification, games use the subjective shot to create identification." (Galloway, 2006, p. 69). The identification is created by the action of the player in the game: "Game design explicitly requires the construction of a complete space in advance that is then exhaustively explorable without montage." (Galloway, 2006, p. 64). As we can see, the emotional involvement of the player has a spatial form, through the use of the first-person perspective and the absence of editing.

The perspective affects the emotional involvement of the player, and therefore their gaming experience. Although the player can experience surprise and suspense in both the personal and impersonal perspectives, the player's emotional tension is constructed differently depending on the type of perspective, as Grodal points out in relation to the experience of flow in his PECMA flow model. This tension is structured on the basis of narrative space, for example, in the personal perspective, the medium shot frames the action on-screen while any possible threats or surprises are hidden off-screen. This device has been widely used in the entirely history of cinema, from *Nosferatu* (Murnau, 1922) to *The Visit* (Shyamalan, 2015) and also in survival horror video games such as *Silent Hill* series of games (1999-2012) or *Dead Island* (Juchefskey, 2011). In games

with an impersonal perspective -with more open shots- the emotional tension is not linked to what is off-screen, but rather to a complex and comprehensive control of everything that happens on screen, a complete set of simultaneous actions that the player has to take. We can see an example in games such as the *Age of Empires* series (Ensemble Studios, 1997-2015).

Thus, the perspective in video games relates to the spatial analysis of the point of view. Surprise and suspense can be addressed through visual limitations, which are more frequent in games with a personal perspective, and especially in those with a close shot that forces the player to be aware of the off-screen. This device, which is widely used in first-person perspective games, is directly inspired by cinematic ways of portraying space. In any case, the analysis of perspective helps us to understand how emotional tension works.

TIME ANALYSIS OF POINT OF VIEW: FOCALIZATION

But the emotional tension is not only related to the perspective. In cinema and cinematic narratives -including video games- we cannot assimilate what we see or hear with what we know. Therefore, as well as the audiovisual perspective or display, we will also need to discuss focalization. We must note first that, according to F. Jost and A. Gaudreault (Gaudreault & Jost, 1990, p. 145), cinematic focalization refers to the knowledge relationship between the character who filters or focuses the narrative and the viewer who enjoys it, and not, as in literature, between character and narrator.

In video games, we can find various approaches to the issue of focalization. B. Neitzel applies Genette's three original types of focalization, directly relating what the player knows to what they see and hear, that is point of view as a cognitive and visual value. For Neitzel (Neitzel, 2005, p. 238), the subjective point of view or internal focalization is predominant in first-person shooters; the external focalization is semi-subjective and consists of a follow-mode where the avatar can be seen from behind most of the time, followed by a virtual camera; and lastly, the objective point of view or zero focalization.

Neitzel uses Genette's literary model and not one adapted to audiovisual analysis, hence she does not distinguish between audiovisual display and cognitive focalization. In our view, this distinction must be made. For us, *Tomb Raider* (2013) is an instance of internal focalization with third-person perspective, but is not a case of external focalization, because we cannot say that the character possesses greater information than the player, or that any information possessed by the character is hidden from the player.

M.-L Ryan (Ryan, 2001) suggests another approach to the issue of focalization in video games, based on the analysis of the role of the user in interactive media. The relationship between the user and the virtual world can be classified according to whether the interactivity is internal or external and whether the mode is exploratory or ontological. The first type relates to the focalization, the second one to the study of the narrative. Ryan reformulates Aarseth's concepts, whereby in internal interactivity the user projects themselves as a member of the fictional world, whereas in external interactivity, the user is located outside that world.

We define focalization following the tradition in narratology: the focus that directs the narrative information, which is different from the narrator and the visual and sound perspective, that we have already looked at. Adapted to videogames, focalization relates the narrative information available to the player through characters or other elements in the game. We use the term internal focalization where the information is known through a single character –internal fixed–, as exemplified in *Doom 3* (2004) or *The Walking Dead: The Game* (2012), or several characters –internal variable–, such as in *Heavy Rain* (2010), and zero focalization where we cannot attribute the focus of information to any specific character, or a limited group such as in *Age of Empires III* (2005).

It is our view that in video games the concept of focalization should take into account the special link established between the player and the character or characters. Defining focalization as a comparison between their respective knowledge raises a new difficulty, since the character's behaviour will depend on the knowledge of the player, so that, in that sense, the emotional tension usually linked to focalization becomes meaningless.

In videogames that have a repetitive time structure, such as the *Tomb Raider* (1996-2015) or *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, or in general adventure games and their sub-genres, internal focalization is predominant, strongly linked to a character whose visual and auditory perspective matches the player's one, in the first or third person. In addition, the loop changes the focalization, while the narrative information available to the player varies from the first repetition. The player is a good example of what flow means, learning how to move forward and overcome obstacles. This change in focalization, that is in the player's knowledge, is best explained in relation to the temporal focus: in the first game, the temporal focus is in the present, and the emotional effect on the player is one of surprise, whereas in the repetitions, whether there is one or more, the temporal focus is on the future, since the player anticipates the dangers, of which they are already aware, but not the outcome, which is unknown and dominated by suspense. In some way, focalization, which in narratological terms remains internal, has been separated from the character and focused on the temporal variable of repetition.

It does not seem useful to continue to think about the difference in knowledge between player and character, but rather about the change of temporal focus, which gives a cognitive advantage to the player and dissociates focalization from the character's knowledge. We can then define present-oriented focalization as that in which the player has no cognitive advantage with respect to the diegesis, there can be no anticipation, and corresponds to internal focalization. In future-oriented focalization, the player has a cognitive advantage because the game is in a loop, as we have seen, and corresponds to zero focalization. In games of strategy like *Age of Empires* (1997-2015), the player's knowledge cannot be linked with that of a character or a fairly small group of characters, but with that of an entire community or civilisation. The player's emotional tension depends on their strategic capability of building a strong civilisation, so the emotional tension remains focused on the present, especially when they suffer an attack or any other misfortune. In addition, MMOG games such as *League of Legends* (2009-) or *World of Warcraft* (2005-2016), with fixed internal focalization, from a temporal point of view will be orientated to the present, which logically does not allow for any repetition.

Other videogames have less common types of focalization. In the *Commandos* series (Pyro Studios, 1998-2006) the focalization is variable internal but simultaneous, as the player directs six characters on each mission. Once again, the temporal focus is in the present. *Heavy Rain* is a different case, perhaps because of its very cinematic treatment. It has a variable internal focalization, since it moves successively in the different scenes of the game from one character to another. We can consider that the player has a cognitive advantage over each of the characters, but in each of the scenes the focalization is internal and the temporal focalization is on the present.

SUSPENSE EMOTIONS

We will discuss here how the emotions of surprise and suspense are related to perspective and focalization in video games. First of all, we'll say that surprise is a question related to the present –what is happening? – and suspense is a question related to the future –what is going to happen?

B. Perron (Perron, 2005) studies the emotions in video games and proposes three types: the first and second ones

are related to both cinema and video games and the third one is only related to video games. The first type is called fictional emotions or F emotions and are the ones that emerged from the fictional experience, from the immersion into a separated world of experiences. The second type, called A emotions, are related to the narrative artefact and express an admiration for its constitution and structure. The third type is called G emotions and emerges from the gameplay. While the F and A types are passive emotions, the G type is an emotion that comes from action. The player must be acting in order to experience it. But there is a link between the three of them: the player watches –emotions F and A- and acts –emotion G- at the same time. Talking about survival horror games, Perron says that the avatar is not the one meant to be scared or have emotions, but rather the gamer. We can therefore say that F emotions correspond to the narrative layout of video games and are related to perspective, and G emotions correspond to the playable layout of the video games and are related to focalization. As we pointed out, perspective and focalization are mechanics that the player is able to control. So, we can track the marks of the player in the game –the marks of the implied player in the implied game- in order find them.

In film studies, suspense and surprise are two emotional reactions emerged from the encounter of the story development and the viewer expectations. The viewer feels an emotional tension, which is sudden in case of surprise – the viewer has no previous narrative information and, consequently, no expectations- and anticipated in case of suspense –the viewer has narrative information and, consequently, expectations. One of the most famous definitions of surprise and suspense is the one given by Alfred Hitchcock to François Truffaut (Truffaut, 1984, p. 73). Hitchcock explains that a bomb that suddenly explodes in a film gives 15 seconds of surprise to the audience. However, if the audience knows that there is a bomb ready to explode, they will have 15 minutes of suspense. This approach reasserts the key concept: time. In films, surprise and suspense are intimately related to time. Surprise is a sudden resolution while suspense is delayed resolution.

So, principally, suspense relies on the viewer's uncertainty regarding the resolution of the story or a specific scene. The viewer anticipates its ending, but has to wait to see it fulfilled. Suspense is based in hope –for a positive resolution- and fear –for a negative resolution. In that sense, as N. Carroll (Carroll, 1999) points out, the emotions of suspense are strongly linked to probability and morality. In his theoretical framework for analyzing the relation between film and what he calls proper emotions, Carroll establishes that "emotions require cognitions as causes and bodily states as effects. Moreover, among the cognitions that are essential for the formation of the emotional states are those that subsume the objects of the state under certain relevant categories or conceive of said objects as meeting certain criteria" (Carroll, 1999, p. 27). Emotions organize perception, calling our attention to those aspects that are relevant to the reigning emotional state. So, as Carroll explains, a film can be emotively prefocused on a particular affect by being criterially prefocused. Suspense and horror films are two great examples at this.

For Carroll, the objects of our emotional response in horror films evoke a reaction in terms of fear and disgust. The emotive criterion for fear is harmful, and for disgust is impurity. That is, in fear the object must meet the criterion of being harmful or being perceived as harmful, and in disgust it must meet the criterion of being impure. In suspense films, the criteria involve morality and probability. Thus, in suspense films criterially prefocused, there are main events in which the triumph of evil is likely while the chances for righteousness are very little. So, the audience's faculties of cognition are put into play to get an emotional response to the film.

Also in terms of cognition, J. Frome and A. Smuts establish that suspense is based on three conditions with respect to the viewer. The first one is that the

viewer has narrative information. The second one is that she or he can't take part in the narrative development due to being a passive figure. And the last one is that the viewer doesn't know the dramatic resolution but has a desired ending, which usually is the less probable. Regarding these conditions, in a cinematic suspense scene the viewer is helpless.

The viewer's helplessness is related to the narrative information available for her or him. But suspense cannot be explained only in terms of information. According to X. Pérez (Pérez, 1999, p. 78) in suspense there is also a narrative delay strategy. Pérez distinguishes between suspense and suspension. Narrative suspension is part of every story -and lasts the entire story-, in the sense that every story unveils expectations. Every story creates expectations and resolves them by creating new ones. Narrative suspension is part of the narrative strategy. Suspense, however, only appears in some stories, and only in some parts of these. They are episodes with uncertain expectations and an emotional tension that grows during the episode resulting in an anxious and exasperate feeling in the viewer.

SUSPENSE IN THE LOOP STRUCTURE

In terms of focalization, in cinema and films surprise is present oriented and suspense is future oriented. But we cannot expect an interactive artefact like a video game to work in the same way. As we've seen, in cinema, suspense is the result of the dosage of the narrative information and the delay in the resolution. This means that, in films, suspense is related to a cognitive issue –the viewer doesn't know what is going to happen- and a temporal issue –focalization is addressed to the future. However, in video games, suspense and surprise become marks of the implied player, because the G emotions can only emerge while the story is played. The focalization in video games is, by default, present oriented. The implied player is acting continuously and actively into the game in order to overcome the difficulties and progress. The story is permanently in narrative suspension and can only move forward due to the efforts and the activations of the specific game mechanics. The player, therefore, is rarely passive. Because of that, it is difficult to translate into video games the helplessness that we've seen in cinema narrative.

According to Frome and Smuts: "although we have outlined many factors that contribute to uncertainty during game play, and make the player feel that something significant is at stake in the game's outcome, we grant that many games do not generate suspense even if they meet these conditions. What's missing? We have found that the games which are the most effective at creating suspense often put players in situations where they must wait and see what happens, much like a film spectator" (Frome, 2004, p. 29). A limitation in interactivity –for instance, in a cut-scene- can be in favor of suspense. "The cut-scene wrests control away from the player and reinforces the sense that a metaphysical authorial force is at work, shaping the logic of the game. This evocation to helplessness in the face of an inexorable predetermined force is crucial to maintaining horror-based suspense, in that the game world often operates outside the player's control" (Krzywinska, 2002, p. 211).

However, we think that interactivity is fully compatible with suspense. But in video games it works differently, perhaps in a more practical sense, because at the end, every mechanics is available to progress in the game. The implied player has expectations about the future of the story and take decisions in order to avoid -or accomplish- these expectations. So here, suspense is related to the uncertainty that the implied player experiments while acting and solving game problems. The implied player has a strong motivation to find a solution to the problems –a monster attack, being lost in a maze, etc.- of the game. She or he needs to solve these problems to carry on. When the implied player doesn't have any previous information about these problems, surprise will be the effect. But when the implied player knows

these problems –because she or he encountered them in a previous gameplay- then suspense emerges. So, suspense is attached to the loop structure of video games.

According to King and Krzywinska: "A shift occurs here between the qualities of surprise (a sudden attack from an unexpected quarter) and suspense (the tension created by the player's awareness that the attack is about to be triggered)" (King, 2006, p. 118). So, in those video games in which the time structure allows –and often imposes- the loop, the implied player will experience suspense after failing during the first attempt to solve a problem. When the implied player tried for the first time, she or he didn't have enough information. But after failing once –the most common failure can be the death of the character in the game-, the implied player has enough information to create expectations and experience fear and hope. According to Grodal, "in video games, what was surprising in the first playing of the game is transformed into a suspense like coping anticipation in subsequent playings" (Grodal, 2003, p. 149).

As we've seen, in video games suspense is not strictly related to the time scheme and to the helplessness of the player, but to efforts of the implied player to overcome every difficulty. As Grodal points out: "Suspense in video games is interwoven with the interactive and repetitive nature of the game. The outcome in a given game is in principle just as uncertain the second time through as it is the first time. (...) Suspense in video games is partly linked to explorative and dynamic coping, because, contrary to film suspense, video game suspense supports coping, not passive expectations" (Grodal, 2003, p. 149). The temporal variable is fundamental: the loop creates valuable narrative information to overcome the challenges and, at the same time, uncertainty about their resolution.

TESTING THE MODEL

Survival horror video games are a great field to study the mechanism we've exposed. These games combine the mechanics and structures of the adventures with the themes and characters of the horror genre. But, as Carroll points out, suspense is not a genre *per se*, but an emotion that is often elicited in many other genres. If our analytical proposal is minimally convincing, we should be able so to apply it to different sorts of games. Thus, for concluding this paper, we are going to quickly review some of the applications of our model to different games and genres, starting with a survival horror one.

Alan Wake (Remedy Entertainment, 2010) is a paradigmatic example of a survival horror video game that can be extrapolated to the whole genre. Presented as a psychological thriller, it gives the player the opportunity to become Alan Wake, a writer who moves to the lonely and paramount town of Bright Falls with the aim to surpass a creative crisis. But there, he'll find a group of possessed characters trying to hurt him untiringly. In the game, Alan character has infinite number of lives and every time he dies the game restarts in the last action point. We have a third person perspective and a sequence shot in a dark and ominous staging. The possessed appear from the shadows, causing a disturbing surprise to Alan, and also to the player. Even though, we can often anticipate these attacks due to image and framing clues: the image becomes foggy and the frame moves quickly -even abandoning momentarily the first person perspective- to the point where the possessed are approaching. These elements cause surprise the first time, and suspense the following ones. The player is always moving between suspense and the next surprises.

In *Alan Wake*, the player gains access to the audiovisual information through Alan's third person perspective. But we can also change to an impersonal perspective if we want to have a big picture of the scenario and the dangers surrounding us. If that change of perspective is not enough to be prepared for all the upcoming danger and we die because of them, in the next occasion we'll have more information about the

scene. The focalization will move from a present oriented situation to a future oriented one and the implied player will be able to anticipate the number and the magnitude of the perils. So, suspense appears. Every repetition of the same situation in *Alan Wake* is a micro story, containing different doses of surprise and suspense. The efforts that the player makes to abandon this loop structure are essential to understand how suspense can articulate an interactive story. In cinema, the viewer constructs imaginative conjectures about what is going to happen. In narrative video games, the player must act to avoid what is going to happen if she or he doesn't act. This loop, with all its repetitions, is the mark of the implied player in the game. It's an ensemble of actions –a repertoire of failed and succeeded intents- that composed the great picture of the player's emotions from surprise to suspense.

The model described for *Alan Wake* is applicable to numerous survival horror games, but, is it still functional beyond this genre? As we've seen, suspense is an emotion which can be found in different sorts of stories and, of course, in different types of games. For instance, in *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015), an adventure game that mixes elements from the teenage drama with the breathtaking structure of a thriller. In *Life is Strange* the player takes control of a twelfth-grade student named Max who returns to her childhood town, Arcadia Bay, to study photography. While trying to settle there and recovering her relationship with her former best friend Chloe, Max discovers that something disturbing is happening. The plot is divided in five episodes, in which the player must act wisely to avoid the perils and save the town or her friend's life. And we say "or" because there are several developments according to the decisions that the player makes. The game allows the player to choose between different options with different repercussions. Puzzle solving, and branched choices are the main mechanics of the game. As in the first example, there is also a third person perspective, but, in this case, darkness and ominous scenarios are not the usual ground, but the exception. Although there is a melancholic and sad atmosphere, which is reflected in the audiovisual composition, the game portrays a luminous space, clearly different from the ones that are commonly related to the survival horror genre.

However, the most particular feature in this game is that Max has the power to reverse time. In a certain way, we can say that the loop structure we have been referring to is adopted here as a characteristic of the diegetic game world. So, when the player makes a bad decision -that is, a decision that keeps Max away from the goals in the game- there is the option to rewind and try a different choice. This mechanism allows suspense to elicit: when the choice made has led to an ending road, or has caused the death of a friend, the rewind action activates the suspense emotion by giving to the player the chance to pick another option and see where it leads to. Are we going to succeed this time? Are we going to do it faster enough? If we analyze, for example, the scene in the Arcadia's Bay junkyard, placed in the second chapter named *Out of time*, we've got a paradigmatic suspense moment generated by this mechanism. Max's friend Cloe is trapped in the railway sleeper and the train is approaching. We need to find a solution before the train comes and kills her. With the information we've got here, suspense has already appeared. It functions as if we were watching a movie. But if we fail saving Cloe in the first attempt -which is a probable result because we need to solve a puzzle in a countdown situation- suspense will increase openly in the next attempts, until we do save Cloe. That is, future focalization performing at its maxim level. And we can find this suspense generating structure permanently in this game. A different genre, but still the same mechanism.

So far, we have quickly analyzed two games that use a personal perspective, the most common one to generate suspense in video games as much as in cinematic narratives. But is this the only perspective for this purpose? We don't think so. *Inside (*Playhead, 2016),

a platform game that uses an impersonal perspective -the lateral scroll, in this case-, allows several moments of suspense during the gameplay. In the game, a little boy must traverse by night a creepy territory that includes a dark forest, a scary farm, a semi-abandoned city and a disturbing laboratory, without being caught and killed by the guards or other disconcerting people or creatures. Although this game proposes an obscure design, which recreates a nightmare world, we can't classify it as a survival horror game. Like its predecessor, Limbo (Playhead, 2010), *Inside* is a puzzle platformer adventure game. It's very simple in terms of mechanics and gameplay: the player can only make a very limited set of actions, like moving back and forward, jumping and activating mechanisms. Nevertheless, the game can offer a complex narrative in terms of meaning and poetic analogies. And during the gameplay it surely activates the emotions of surprise and suspense.

In *Inside* we find a minimalistic proposal: few movements available for the player, few explanations about the plot and few chances to go through the game world without being killed. It's easy to see our avatar ending up dead, so the situations where we have to search for an alternative solution are rather common. In those cases, suspense emerges easily. When crossing the forests, for example, we must avoid the guards and its patrols, and every time we are captured -and killed- we have to face the same situation with an added emotion of suspense about its resolutions, which, as an implied player, is in our hands. The weakness of the character player -a little boy- poses a great number of situations where we have to replay because we have failed and died. So, different genre and different perspective, but the same suspense mechanism.

We tested our model in three games that, though being adventure games, belong to different specific genres and present different characteristics, mechanics and perspectives. But they have a common thing: if we fail in reaching our goals, our character dies or we get stuck, so we are forced to replay the scene or the situation in order to reach a more positive ending. That's exactly where suspense arises openly. But what happens in a game where the main character cannot die, and we are not forced to replay? What happens in a game without a loop structure? Is suspense still appearing and functioning with the same parameters? For a brief study of this case we will quickly analyze the game *Firewatch* (Campo Santo 2016). In this game, we play with an avatar, Henry, who spends a few months as a firewatcher in the Shonshone National Forest, in the state of Wyoming, after his wife has developed dementia. The only human contact he has is with Delilah, his supervisor, through to a walkie-talkie connection. So, he is practically on his own. This is an adventure about solitude, memory and the acceptance of life misfortunes. It belongs to the drama genre, nevertheless, it has tense and scary moments. The dramatic structure relies completely on an interior arch development. But Henry cannot die. This is clearly an extremely uncommon situation in videogames, which we find interesting to notice and test with our model.

Firewatch is a game where the mechanics only allow us to explore the scenario, make simple actions and choose between different answers in our conversations with Delilah. However, the use of the first person perspective and the story of a conspired mystery that happened years ago in this place -which is explained by Delilah through the walkie-talkie- persuade us to experiment tense emotions. When we visit a dark cave, when we sneak into the camp of a strange meteorological research or when we find the camp where a father and his child tried to survive without fortune, we feel great tension, reinforced by the music and Delilah's words. Even though nothing can happen to us during the game -a fact that we only discover after playing it entirely, or if another player tells us- we found several strain situations during the gameplay. But in these cases, we cannot consider these situations as scenes that elicit emotions of suspense, because we, as players and viewers, don't have enough information:

the focalization is present oriented. That is, there is a lack of cognition that avoids the appearance of proper suspense. Although we have to wait and see what happens in many situations that are perceived as dangerous and even difficult to overcome, we must conclude that there is no real suspense in these situations, but anxiety.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the model for analysing suspense is developed through the study of the implied player -a fundamental theoretical figure that sums up all gameplay possibilities in every game and is key to understand video games narrative- and the point of view, which is defined on its two characteristic features: perspective and focalization. The first relates to the focus of audiovisual information, linking gameplay and the implied player. It can be personal or impersonal. We have seen that this is directly related to the treatment of space. We have also seen that focalization is related to the treatment of time. In video game, the temporal focus is present-oriented when we played for the first time and future-oriented when we enter the loop by repeating the same scenes of the play -the inexistence of a loop structure is extremely rare and statistically non-relevant for our model. We've seen that when we have entered a loop structure with a future-oriented focus and a (usually) close perspective, suspense emerges. And here –unlike in films- the implied player must act to avoid those feared expectations. The helplessness that the viewer experiments in a suspense scene in cinema mutates when we talk about narrative video games, because here the implied player has a strong motivation to act, change the end of the previous gameplay and reach her or his goal in the game.

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