

Temporality, Authorial Intentions, and Truth in Video Game Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis examines the claim that video games differ fundamentally from other media in terms of fictional truth. Fictional truth has been treated extensively in the field of philosophy of fiction, primarily in relation to literature and, to a certain extent, film, but video games have been far too neglected. Truth in game fiction has been discussed by game scholars, and one prevalent view is that fictional truth in games can be altered through the interaction of the player. Scholars support this claim with reference to the purportedly unique nature of games as a medium in terms of temporality and authorial intentions, asserting that these two factors determine truth differently in game fiction.

Game scholars often argue that video game stories have other temporal properties than novels and films, that game stories take place in the present and that this makes it possible for players to alter the truth-value of fictional propositions. They also argue that games have an interactive fictional truth, and that the player is some kind of author. However, by applying theories from philosophy of fiction, and with a methodology based in analytic philosophy, the thesis refutes these claims. I show that there are fundamental issues with their conception of time in fiction and that they fail to show why the arguments used to defend this conception are applicable exclusively to games. I also show that they fail to connect their claims regarding authorship to corresponding discussions in philosophy of fiction, where there have been extensive debates surrounding the importance of authorial intentions and to what extent these can determine the fictional truth of a given work; the same issues making it problematic to ascribe too much authority to the creator of a fictional work are retained and/or exacerbated when players are seen as authors. The thesis thus refutes common claims in game studies and expands the scope of philosophy of fiction.

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Presentations

Some of the work presented in the thesis has been presented in part and in altered form in the following article and unpublished papers:

Ricksand, M. (forthcoming) Walton, Truth in Fiction, and Video Games: A Rejoinder to Willis. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

'How long does it take?: Duration of story events in relation to the duration of playing' at the conference 'Between: Interdisciplinarity and the Expanded Field', University of Wolverhampton (08/10/2018).

'Right about now: The occurrence of story events in a video game in relation to the player', at the conference 'Play, Masks and Make-believe: Exploring Boundaries of Fictional Contexts', organized by London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (22/09/2018).

Introduction

How do we know what is true within a story? Works of fiction are about people who never existed and events that never took place, and although opinions differ on how to correctly interpret any given work, we often agree on basic tenets: Harry Potter is a young wizard living in a world full of magic and supernatural creatures; this is true both in the novels and their cinematic adaptations. Philosophers of fiction have dealt more in detail with what it takes for something to be true in a literary or a cinematic work, and although discussions are far from settled, the field has advanced significantly in the last decades.

Video games, however, are a different matter. Although early discussions may have concerned their status as narratives, it is hardly controversial nowadays to analyse games as one would a literary or cinematic narrative. A new problem that so far has not been addressed sufficiently is not their narrativity *per se*, but how they differ from other media in terms of fictional truth. Truth in fiction has been treated extensively with reference to literature and, to a lesser extent, cinema, but when it comes to video games this question has been far too neglected. Whilst opinions vary, game scholars often agree that games are more interactive than literature and film in the sense that the interpreter – that is, the player – can alter the story. Although it feels as if one can interact with a video game's story in a way one cannot do with a literary or cinematic one, it is debatable whether good reasons have been presented as to why games should be any different from other media. This thesis shows that arguments presented so far are either too undeveloped to offer a substantial defence of the view, or they are reminiscent of arguments used in relation to literature and cinema, which suffer from flaws that are retained and sometimes exacerbated when applied to games. Common arguments used to defend the interactivity of video game stories appeal to

temporal properties purportedly unique to video game narratives, without explaining why games can be said to possess these properties, let alone why they are the only medium to possess them. Others state that the player is some kind of author or coauthor, but fail to connect this to debates in literary and cinematic narratives on authorship and the value of authorial intentions, where so-called 'intentionalism' has been proven to be highly problematic, if not untenable.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the concept of truth in video game fiction. The topic of fictional truth is too large and multifaceted to be covered in a single thesis, so this thesis will consider to what extent the interpreter – that is, the player – can interact with and actively influence the story of a given game. By truth in fiction I mean *that which the work in question prescribes the interpreter to imagine, what is true in the world alluded to by a work of fiction*. I deliberately use a comparatively vague definition which many philosophers of fiction can agree upon, so as to avoid raising questions less germane to the thesis. An almost identical definition has been presented by Kendall Walton (1990) and elaborated on by Gregory Currie (1990), Alex Byrne (1993), Robin Le Poidevin (2007) and Kathleen Stock (2017), but I have removed elements unique to their respective schools of interpretation. Hence, fictional truth (the way the thesis uses the notion) is restricted to the fictional world and has no necessary correlation with the real/actual world. Thus, it is more appropriate to say that a given proposition p is *fictionally* true, or $F(p)$. To what extent (and how) a fictional work may convey truth about the real world is outside the scope of the thesis.

When I speak of interacting with the story, I mean the possibility of altering the truth-value of a proposition in the fictional world by means of interaction with

the narrative. One can certainly interact with the physical properties of a novel or a film, but I do not refer to such actions when I speak of interactivity; if one pauses a film, one does not imagine that time within the fictional world freezes, and if one adds words to or rips out pages from a novel it would not count as changing anything in the story. By contrast, when playing video games one gets the impression that interaction with the narrative translates into interaction with the story, so that an alteration of the representation entails a corresponding alteration of something within the fictional world. The thesis shows that this is merely an impression, there is no good reason to assume that the truth-value of a proposition within the fictional world has been altered. Moreover, one could say that one interacts with a story (in some sense of the word) when one interprets it, seeing how one is obliged to 'fill in' what is omitted, but nevertheless implied by the narrative; for the sake of clarity I will refer to this only as interpreting and/or reacting to the story.

Narratological discussions of video games often emphasize the unique nature of the medium, with several scholars arguing that video game narratives differ from literary and cinematic ones in how they allow the player to interact with the story in a way a reader or spectator cannot (e.g. Pearce 2004a, 2004b; Min Lee, Park, and Jin 2006; Davidson 2008; Ip 2011; Warkentin 2011; Holmes 2012; Laurel 2014; Ulas 2014; Wendler 2014; Haggis 2016; Zarzycki 2016; Hanson 2018; Mosselaer 2018; Whaley 2018; Wildman and Woodward 2018; Willis 2019). One endemic deficiency in video game scholarship is that scholars seem to underestimate the activity of readers and spectators whilst, conversely, overestimating that of players. Comparatively few theorists discussing games manage to integrate knowledge from fields in philosophy and/or the humanities more thoroughly, and they fail to relate questions of fictional truth in video game stories to other media, even though these have been treated extensively. By

contrast, philosophers of fiction have primarily focused on literature and, sometimes, cinema, but mostly neglect video games (e.g. Lewis 1978; Searle 1979; Tolhurst and Wheeler 1979; Walton 1990; Currie 1990, 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 2010; Byrne 1993; Livingston 1993, 2005, 2009; Wilson 1997; Phillips 1999; Hanley 2004; Kania 2005, 2007; Levinstein 2007; Stecker and Davies 2010; Kindt and Müller 2011; Friend 2017; Stock 2017; Badura and Berto 2019). Philosophy of video game fiction thus remains undeveloped compared to literature and cinema with regard to fictional truth. Philosophers who do study video games lack the analytic approach necessary to scrutinize claims made by game scholars,¹ and sometimes repeat what has already been said by game scholars without providing better arguments. This is problematic for several reasons, the most important one being that arguments and conclusions found in the philosophy of fiction could potentially refute claims of truth in video game fiction, thus invalidating the purported authorship of the player; no substantial study has been made where the philosophy of fiction is applied thoroughly and systematically to video games in this particular area.

The player is often claimed to influence the game's story for two reasons: either because the story takes place in the present, allowing for the player to interact with it, or because the player becomes some kind of author of the narrative. Neither of these arguments is well defended. In general, questions of time are overlooked in video game scholarship, and most game scholars commit one of two fallacies: the first is that the arguments presented are too rudimentary and reveal little about the temporality of video game stories, but nevertheless build on the implicit premise that video games take place in the present (e.g. Murray 1997; Laurel 2014; Ryan 2015); the second is the explicit claim that video game

¹ Note the comparatively vague use of the term 'game scholar': when used in the thesis it refers to a scholar writing about games, who need not necessarily have an academic background in game studies.

stories take place in the present, but the arguments used to defend this view are similar or even identical to the ones that have been (or could potentially be) used in relation to other media, such as film and literature (e.g. Juul 2005; Nitsche 2007; Thabet 2015; Hanson 2018).² From this perspective it would follow that if video game stories really do take place in the present, so do films and books, which should make them equally interactive; game scholars do not seem to be aware of this.

As for authorship, many scholars ascribe authority to the player (e.g. Davidson 2008; Warkentin 2011; Backe 2012; Thabet 2015) but fail to elaborate on what it means to be an author in general and one of video game narratives in particular, raising the question of why the player should be regarded as the author of a game's story and why arguments defending players as authors do not apply to readers or film-spectators. Furthermore, the importance these scholars ascribe to authorship is redolent of the reverence that has been held for literary authors and cinematic directors (so-called *auteurs*) in literary studies and film studies; theorists discussing games fail to address consequences stemming from their respective conceptions of authorship. They neglect general problems of attributing the author with too much responsibility for the narrative, as well as the specific problems unique to video games as a medium, and what issues that follow from seeing the player as an author.

The reason why this is important is because if truth in fiction is malleable, it would undermine possibilities of video game criticism and scholarship. One could no longer analyse the story of any game, since it changes for every playthrough, so appraisals (e.g. awards) would be meaningless, as would criticism of a game's immoral content, since the person praising/criticizing the story is effectively the one

² For more on temporality and fiction, see e.g. Yaffe (2003), Le Poidevin (2001, 2007, 2016), and Bourne and Caddick Bourne (2016).

who creates it. This would make it problematic to hold game designers responsible for immoral content, since it is the player who makes it true that a game is, for instance, racist and/or sexist. The current rating-system could also be questioned: although it is the designer who includes the possibility of including less child-friendly content, it is ultimately the players themselves who make a game suitable for people of a certain age by playing it in a certain way (and one would not hold a programmer responsible for the possibility of including offensive content in a story written with a word processor she created). In short, the very possibility of speaking of a video game's story hinges on the validity of arguments presented so far regarding video game narratology; if they turn out to be valid it follows that scholarship and criticism pertaining to video game stories become futile.

The research questions explored in this thesis are thus as follows:

- 1) What does analytic philosophy reveal about the validity of arguments used to defend video games as fictions with a malleable fictional truth?
- 2) What do theories from philosophy of fiction reveal about fictional truth in video games in relation to temporality and authorial intentions in terms of the possibility for players to alter it?
- 3) In what way(s), and to what extent, do temporal properties of video game narratives allow for interaction with their stories in a way different from literary and cinematic narratives?
- 4) In what way(s), and to what extent, can the player be ascribed authorship allowing for interaction with video game stories in a way different from literary and cinematic narratives?

Methodology

Crucially, then, the thesis differs from earlier research on video games in its application of analytic philosophy and philosophy of fiction. The reason why analytic philosophy is suitable for this study is that scholarship on truth in video game fiction so far seems to mostly have a basis in continental philosophy and its use in film studies and literary studies (which is not to say that all game scholars draw on *any* philosophical theories), and therefore lacks the requisite clarity and logic that analytic philosophy brings to the issues of temporality, intention, and agency. It is not uncommon for arguments to be obtuse, even contradictory, which could have been avoided, had scholars applied a more analytic perspective. Arguments common in game studies entail absurd consequences or presume unlikely premises, and the failure to expound theories in an analytic manner hides this fact. Thus, given the application of analytic philosophy in philosophy of fiction and temporality, the validity of various arguments about games, narratology, and interactivity will not only become more astute and clearer, but also provide better reasons for accepting/refuting contemporary theories on video games as a consequence. Few game scholars treated in the thesis provide adequate reasons for accepting their respective theories, and arguments are reduced to question-begging statements, rendering the entire debate ineffectual. With a more analytic perspective correct conclusions become more persuasive, and incorrect ones can be refuted.

The thesis consists of two parts, each of which begins with an exposition of a particular area in game studies followed by corresponding and/or related theories in philosophy of fiction. Theories of game scholars are then analysed in terms of cogency and validity in order to assess whether they stand up to scrutiny, i.e. whether actual and/or potential arguments can support their conclusions.

Although some philosophers have already addressed video games, their conclusions mostly do not differ significantly from those already arrived at by game scholars. The contribution to knowledge is thus twofold: *advancing both game studies as well as philosophy of fiction*.

The thesis elaborates on and develops game scholars' theories on these matters; not all interpretations of these are defended explicitly by said scholars themselves, but nevertheless follow as plausible/necessary consequences. The validity of a given theory is examined not only through scrutiny of its premises and conclusions, but also by looking at possible consequences following from it, and how these may invalidate what at first seems like a tenable theory.

Terminology

Throughout the thesis I use the terms 'story' and 'fiction' interchangeably to refer to the event(s) described/depicted by a novel, film, or video game. The word 'narrative' is used to refer to the presentation of said event(s). I adopt this use from theorists such as Gérard Genette (1980), David Bordwell (1985), and Herman Porter Abbott (2008). I also use the term 'representation' as a synonym of 'narrative'.

The thesis employs game-related terminology which may be unfamiliar to readers less versed in video games. A 'cut-scene' is a non-interactive film-sequence within the game, typically employed to convey narrative content (Tavinor 2009 pp.112-14, p.199; Zagal and Mateas 2010 p.851; Holmes 2012 p.211; Ali 2015 p.272; Mukherjee 2015 p.64). 'Gameplay' is, as Dylan Holmes notes, a term often used but seldom defined, and he defines it as the sum of a game's interactive components, as opposed to story, sound, and graphics (2012, p.214). Grant Tavinor defines it as '*the interactive involvement typically associated with videogames, that is, the activities that occur when one plays a videogame*' (2009,

p.86; original emphasis), and Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith and Susana Pajares Tosca define it as *'the game dynamics emerging from the interplay between rules and game geography'* (2008, p.102; original emphasis). I use it in a similar fashion to refer to instances of interaction with the game. For instance, the act of jumping and running in *Super Mario Bros* (Nintendo, 1987) is part of its gameplay, as opposed to the visual, auditive, and narratological aspects. Related to this is a 'playthrough', by which I mean a complete traversal of a given game from start to finish. A playthrough need not be accomplished in one sitting, but can be divided into several 'gaming-sessions' or 'playing-sessions', by which I mean one uninterrupted session of engaging with a given game (which can include brief pauses). A playthrough, in my definition, need not include completion of any secondary tasks (so-called 'side-quests'), only missions and quests that are required for completion of the game (if they are completed before the final story-mission I count them as part of that playthrough, but not if they are completed after it).

For the sake of simplicity and clarity I speak of directors and game designers as equivalent to authors of novels, as if these are always singular people. In practice it is safe to assume that most games and films are made by more than one person, but the focus of the thesis is not on the question of whether a single person in a film/game-crew can and/or should always be singled out as the sole creator of a given work, but whether players can be ascribed such a role at all.

If nothing else is stated, the thesis uses the terms 'author', 'artist', and 'creator' synonymously and in a general sense to denote the creator of a work of fiction, the one who makes decisions regarding its content and presentation. Since the thesis focuses on literary, cinematic, and ludologic works, these are the ones I primarily refer to with the term 'work'. Other kinds of art are discussed when they

can reveal something about these three categories, but then it is made clear that another art-form is discussed.

For brief outlines of games discussed extensively in the thesis, see the appendix 'Key games discussed in the thesis'.

Theoretical limitations

Since the thesis adopts a definition of fictional truth that only pertains to truth *in* fiction, some areas of philosophy of fiction are automatically excluded, such as the truth *of* fiction, propositions that do not obtain within the fictional world but nevertheless express something true about the work *per se*. For instance, a work's themes and genre can be identified only by an interpreter; it is not true within the story that the events are to be categorized as a certain genre with a particular thematic meaning.³ Thus, the thesis does not treat so-called categorial and/or thematic properties. One reason for this is that if there is a fundamental difference between genre/themes and purely semantic content, the question of how to distinguish between them would require too much space in relation to how peripheral it is to the central arguments of the thesis. On the other hand, if there is no fundamental difference between these two types of content, lines of reasoning regarding semantic properties can be applied to categorial and thematic ones as well, vitiating the need for an entirely new set of arguments.⁴

Since the focus of the thesis is narratives, the games that are studied have a 'pre-structured' narrative with a path the player must follow in order to reach a predesignated ending which functions as a conclusion to the story (or several

³ I adopt this distinction between truth in/of fiction from Levinstein (2007).

⁴ For more on the distinction between semantic and categorial aspects of fiction, see e.g. Currie (1990), Beardsley (1992), Levinson (1992), Nathan (1992), Walton (1995), Iseminger (1996), Carroll (1997b, 2002), Livingston (1998, 2003, 2005), Trivedi (2001), D. Davies (2007), Stock (2017), Wildman and Woodward (2018).

paths and endings, in the case of branching narratives). Games with no narrative at all, such as abstract games, are of little interest to the thesis.

Moreover, game scholars sometimes speak of what is referred to as 'emergent narratives', which, according to Henry Jenkins, encompasses narratives that are constructed through gameplay; he mentions *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) as an example of a game associated with emergent narratives (2004, p.128-9).⁵ Similarly, Pearce explains that even in a game like basketball, a narrative 'emerges as a product of the play itself' (2004a, p.145; original emphasis). I will not be considering such narratives since they do not qualify as narratives proper; the term 'emergent narrative' exemplifies an incorrect and misleading use of the word 'narrative'. Without delving into debates on definitions of narrativity, it is evident that a chain of events is not a narrative only because it can be made into one; if that were the case, *any* chain of events would be a narrative, rendering the notion too broad.⁶ A person playing *The Sims* is more like a child using dolls to 'play house' than an author writing a novel.⁷

Moreover, the thesis will not treat multiplayer games (games including more than one human player, often played online), because firstly, they seldom have the narrative emphasis often found in single-player games; secondly, their constant updates create practical issues as a given version of the game may not exist for long, and the game may not be playable when it decreases in popularity and servers are emptied of players and/or 'shut down' by their owners; thirdly, if players are authors of interactive stories, there is no reason why my results would be any less applicable in principle.⁸ Narrative complexity could increase in line with the

⁵ For more on emergent narratives, see also Juul (2005, pp.157-9).

⁶ The same categorical error has been noted by Espen Aarseth (1997, p.94).

⁷ Will Wright himself, creator of *The Sims*, compares the game to a dollhouse (Pearce 2004a, p.150).

⁸ My reasons for focusing on single-player games are similar to those of Holmes (2012, p.188), Andrew Kania (2018, p.196), and Marissa Willis (2019, pp.43-4).

increase in the number of authors (i.e. players), but no fundamental difference should emerge. If it does, that is a topic for future research when a theoretical foundation has been created, but this foundation is preferably based on less complex examples, i.e. single-player games. Also, the thesis does not treat board games of any kind, including pen-and-paper role-playing games.

Another area outside the scope of the thesis is the old debate surrounding authorship. This debate has a long history within other disciplines, such as the 'Death of the Author' treated by Roland Barthes (1977a) and Michel Foucault ([1979]2002) – and the later debates about auteur theory in film studies – but these are not pertinent to my arguments.⁹ Both Barthes and Foucault seem to have ideological motivations for rejecting the focus on authorship (e.g. that it is too oppressive), but such arguments are of a different order, outside the scope of this work.

Another aspect of interactivity not treated in the thesis is how video games in some sense interact with their players. Questions of whether and/or how players are affected by what they play in terms of changes in personality and values – and how players interact with one another either in the game or in real life as they meet up to play – pertain to disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and phenomenology, and can therefore not be answered with the analytic approach of the thesis.

Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into two parts, the first treating temporality and the second

⁹ Carroll similarly does not devote much attention to Barthes for the reason that Barthes's theory, as Carroll says, is not very 'developed' (1992, p.111), and Lamarque (2002a, p.84) notes that the Death of the Author is not of high interest to the debate on intentionalism. See e.g. Lamarque (2002a), Nehemas (2002), and Stecker (2003) for further criticism of Barthes's and Foucault's attacks on author-based criticism.

authorship. The overarching question of the first part is whether a game's story can be said to take place in the present, as this is often cited as a reason why game stories are interactive and literary/cinematic ones are not, the latter being thought of as accounts of *past* events. In chapter 1 I introduce discussions from game studies regarding temporality. I then discuss the claim that the story takes place in the present, i.e. that fictional events occur at the time they are represented, whereafter I present some issues following from this, pertaining to the duration of the narrative in relation to the story and the truth-value of future-tensed propositions. In chapter 2 I continue treating issues following from the claim that the story takes place in the present, such as how to explain flashbacks and separate screenings of the same fiction; I conclude by questioning the very principle of identifying any moment as the fictional present, i.e. of claiming that there is a metaphysically privileged point in time within the fictional world.

The overarching theme of the second part of the thesis concerns the consequences following from viewing players as authors and possible objections to doing so. In chapter 3 I examine the claim that the player is the author of the game narrative and relate this to discussions in philosophy of fiction on actual intentionalism, i.e. the mode of interpretation positing that the author of a narrative decides what is true in its story. The chapter treats the two largest schools of actual intentionalism, extreme intentionalism and modest intentionalism, and explores possible consequences of combining either of them with the assumption that the player is the author. In chapter 4 I examine reasons for asserting that the player is a kind of coauthor of the game narrative, creating it together with the designer, and scrutinize theories on coauthorship and the so-called 'conversation analogy' in order to see whether they can be applied on video games.

Chapter 1 – Temporality

This chapter examines whether fictional truth in video games differs because of putative differences regarding temporality, and critiques the claim that video game stories take place in the present; through the application of philosophy of fiction I show that there is no good reason to believe that a story takes place now only by virtue of the medium in which it is conveyed (irrespective of the medium conveying it), or even that there is a fictional present at all. I show that the arguments supporting such views are equally applicable to stories in other media, meaning that game stories are not fundamentally different. From this it follows that game stories cannot be said to be interactive because of particular temporal properties, as these do not differ from stories in literature and cinema.

In the first section I present several game theorists and show how their views implicitly or explicitly indicate that game stories are interactive because they take place in the present. In the second section I show that the time of reception of an audiovisual narrative and the time of a story occurrence are dissociated from each other in games as well as other media. In the third section I argue that if the story is set in the present it follows that the duration of the story corresponds to that of the narrative, so if this consequence can be refuted, the assumption must be refuted as well. In the fourth and final section I examine the truth-value of future-tensed propositions, and show that if games are set in the present, future truths must be indeterminate in games but determinate in other media; both of these claims are shown to be incorrect.

One important concept in the chapter is what Currie calls the 'Claim of Presentness' (henceforth the CoP), i.e. that the audience imagines that the events of a film are occurring now, as in at the time they see it (1995a, p.201). Currie

explains that the CoP follows from the so-called Imagined Observer Hypothesis, the theory that the audience allegedly pretends to be within the fictional world. Currie's definition thus pertains to film and follows from a specific kind of engagement with the narrative. In this thesis I diverge from Currie's more specific definition and refer to the CoP in a wider, vaguer sense: that a given story purportedly takes place at the time of reception, regardless of medium.

There is an important distinction prevalent in philosophy of time which will be used throughout the chapter, that between what John McTaggart (1927) calls the A-series and the B-series. The A-series comprises notions of past, present, and future, and it is within this series that events change temporal location, in the sense that what is future now will become present and eventually past; time 'flows' in the A-series. By contrast, the B-series describes events as being earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than one another; the B-series pertains to unchanging structures, and time does not change as much as our perspective (McTaggart 1927, pp.9-10). The question is then whether games – or any medium – can convey A-series properties or just B-series properties, and whether the A-series properties of a story can be aligned with those of reality.

A simple way of disproving the claim that game stories are in the present would be to invoke earlier definitions of narrativity according to which the story is temporally precedent to the narrative through which it is conveyed. Marie-Laure Ryan explains that the standard conception of narrativity is that one is telling someone about something that happened (2004a, p.13); Christian Metz states that a narrative 'suppresses' the now (1974, p.22); Keir Elam thinks that classical narratives are 'oriented towards [...] an imaginary "elsewhere" set in the past' (2002, p.98); Abbott asserts that narratives are representations of stories that seem to pre-exist their conveyance (2008, p.15); Genette argues that simultaneous narration is possible (1980, pp.216-17), but does not delve deeper

into what it signifies ontologically for narration to exist simultaneously with the events narrated. Genette's examples of radio and television reports as simultaneous narration on the contrary show that narration cannot be completely simultaneous, as he claims that 'the narrating *follows* so closely on the action that it can be considered *practically* simultaneous, whence the use of the present tense' (1980, p.216n9; emphasis added). This rather suggests that narration must refer to past events, that there must be a gap between narration and what is narrated; if the comments were simultaneous with the action they would require supernatural prescience on the part of the commentators. However, unmotivated adherence to old narratological definitions would be question-begging and would rule out from the very beginning any possible revision of narratological taxonomy where interactive stories could be conceivable.

If the story's being set in the present is both necessary and sufficient for making it interactive, it follows that either all stories (regardless of medium) are interactive, insofar as they take place now, or, conversely, no stories are interactive. One could claim that presentness is a necessary yet not sufficient reason for interactivity, and that films lack what games have (apart from presentness) that renders stories interactive; however, as will become clear in the first section, game theorists seem to argue that presentness is both necessary and sufficient. Should one maintain that presentness is necessary but insufficient at least four questions have to be answered: why is presentness necessary but not sufficient for stories to be interactive; what other property (or properties) do games have that make their stories interactive; why is this property necessary but not sufficient; what is it that makes this property (or properties) exclusive to video game narratives?

We thus have three claims to scrutinize:

1. Game stories take place in the present.

2. Temporal properties of game stories are different from those of stories in other media.
3. The conjunction of 1) and 2) in game stories allows the player to interact with them.

These three claims make up the argument that game stories can be influenced by the 'reader' of the story, i.e. the player; if 1), 2), or 3) can be shown to be false, it follows that game stories are not interactive.

1.1 The Claim of Presentness in game studies

One common conception of video games is that they are narratives with stories that are interactive in a different way from conventional ones, in the sense that player interaction influences the story of the game (e.g. Davidson 2008; Wei, Bizzocchi, and Calvert 2010; Ip 2011; Warkentin 2011; Holmes 2012; Laurel 2014; Ulas 2014; Wendler 2014; Haggis 2016; Zarzycki 2016; Whaley 2018). However, few game theorists elaborate on what implications this conception of stories has for story temporality, but some suggest or explicitly argue that game stories, in contrast to stories in 'traditional' media, take place now, at the same time they are presented (e.g. Murray 1997; Juul 2001, 2005; Newman 2004; Dubbelman 2011; Holmes 2012; Mukherjee 2015; Ryan 2015; Thabet 2015; Hanson 2018). Jenkins is one of few people claiming that games are *not* 'locked into an eternal present' (2004, p.127), and Diane Carr occupies a middle ground, saying that games involve events that precede the player's perception of them, as in conventional narration, but also that they generate new events (2006, pp.38-9). It is nevertheless common to claim that game stories take place now. Though not all theoreticians claim explicitly that game stories must take place in the present, it is a likely and/or necessary consequence of their arguments (outlined below) that players can ascertain the location of the fictional present, and that it coincides with

that of the time of playing.

The view that game narratives must take place in the present can be found in early ludologic discussions. Janet Murray claims that events in games do not happen in the past to someone else, but now, to the player (1997, pp.79-81). In a related vein, Brenda Laurel contends that some of the representation's content is attributable to either the person or the computer, and some content is an artefact of collaboration; an interface is a shared context for action in which both are agents, not merely the means whereby a person and a computer represent themselves (2014, p.5). As in the model proposed by Murray, the active participation of the user is emphasized when Laurel claims that people adopt the roles of actors, and that the notion of observer disappears (2014, p.27). Though Laurel does not elaborate on temporal consequences, a shared interface arguably presupposes a shared temporality as it would be paradoxical to claim that the user's interaction is in the present but that of the computer is in the past or future. A similar view is presented by Ryan as she presents a taxonomy of interactivity. She outlines the epistemological and ontological properties of interactive texts, and identifies two dichotomies defining what position a user is ascribed in relation to a digital representation: internal/external and ontological/exploratory, which, when combined, make up four distinct pairs (2015 p.163-5). The most common of these in computer games, she says, is the internal-ontological, in which the player impersonates or creates a member of a story-world, 'writing' the life of her character and the history of the world. 'The narrative is created dramatically, by being enacted, rather than diegetically, by representing past events' (Ryan 2015, p.164). In an internal-exploratory text, the user cannot change anything in the storyworld, in spite of occupying a perspective 'that reflects the embodied point of view of one of its members' (Ryan 2015, p.164).

Similar to Ryan, Teun Dubbelman distinguishes between what he calls a

'presentational logic' and 'representational logic' (2011, p.165). Presentological narratives create story events in the present whereas representological ones communicate events from the past (Dubbelman 2011, p.169). He argues that a story can be set in the present irrespective of interactivity or lack thereof, and is thus one of few game theorists who downplays purported differences between games and other narratives in terms of temporality, whilst still concurring with other game theorists that games can and do take place in the present. Holmes presents a model similar to that of Laurel, that video games convey that 'the player and his avatar are one and the same' (2012, p.51), which indicates that Holmes believes that they share the same temporal frame. He confirms this consequence when he says that players are in the game (2012, p.58), and that the story is 'happening', even in the case of flashbacks (2012, p.72).

Juul has treated temporality more extensively than many other scholars, and he argues that 'the game constructs the story time as synchronous with narrative time and reading/viewing time: the story time is now' (Juul 2001). Juul asserts that time is almost always chronological in games, since flash-forwards and flashbacks eliminate any possible impact of the player's agency, either because of the predetermined character of the story or because of the possible paradoxes following as a result; should the player fail in a flashback, it would render the present impossible (2005, pp.147-8). Another reason why Juul maintains that flashbacks are a potential 'hazard' in game narratives is the sheer impossibility of reconciling player interaction with the temporal properties of the events portrayed: 'it is impossible to influence something that has already happened' (Juul 2001). Juul argues that the possibility of interaction necessitates that the fictional time of the game and the play time of the player coincide at least once, and he uses the terms 'mapping' (2004, p.134) or 'projection' (2005, p.143) to refer to the phenomenon when 'the player's time and actions are projected into

a game world' (2004, p.134). It is because of this moment of 'mapping/projection', says Juul, that games have the sense of happening in the present. Juul seems to argue that since literary and cinematic narratives are not interactive, it makes sense to conclude that they are in the past: past events cannot be interacted with, and since events in literary and cinematic narratives cannot be interacted with, they must be set in the past. Games, by contrast, allow for interaction, and therefore they must be in the present.

James Newman agrees with and draws on Juul when explaining that narratives in other media recount past events (2004, p.103). Nevertheless, claims by Juul have been questioned indirectly by other scholars. Hans-Joachim Backe also speaks of 'mapping', but says that this relation between real world time and game world time changes incessantly and can be manipulated by the player (2016, pp.11-12). José Zagal and Michael Mateas agree that future events in games are influenced by the player's actions (2010, p.845), which suggests that it takes place in the present, but they also mention that games can have playable flashbacks (2010, p.851), and these claims seem irreconcilable for the reasons mentioned by Juul. Huaxin Wei, Jim Bizzocchi, and Tom Calvert object that it is more common for recent games to contain flashbacks, and mention some examples (2010, p.5).

Like Juul, Tamer Thabet emphasizes the immediacy of games in contrast to literary narratives, saying that the player narrates the story as it occurs, not as a past experience. He goes so far as to 'fuse' the selves of the player and the protagonist, claiming that a game narrative is a live experience (Thabet 2015, p.32-4). Thabet does not think that flashbacks undermine his presentist claim, but says that the temporal properties of the fiction are maintained as the player narrates the present of that past episode, being transported from one present to another (2015, p.35).

Michael Nitsche, like Thabet, claims that players are ‘transported to a new temporal location’ (2007, p.147). Similar to Juul, he speaks of mapping, but argues that the relation between story time and narrative time need only be constant, not direct, meaning that the narrative time can be slower/faster than story time as long as it is *always* slower/faster (Nitsche 2007, p.147). However, this seems to contradict his claim (similar to Backe’s) that the ‘mapping’ can be manipulated by the player in some games (Nitsche 2007, p.148). Nitsche also contends that games differ from cinema and literature in how films and books concern past events, whereas events portrayed in games are generated at the time of narration (2009, p.55).

Christopher Hanson devotes an entire book to time in video games, and he asserts that video game temporality is unique (2018, p.153). Hanson argues that the player’s ability to manipulate the temporality allows her to alter the text itself (2018, p.198), and he speaks of ‘copresence’ (2018, p.22, p.45, p.50), which refers to the player’s purported experience of being present within the structure and rules of the game, and argues that players ‘operate in the shared space and time of copresence [...] with the game itself’ (2018, p.36). Like Laurel and Tavinor, he notes the similarity between players and actors, arguing that the player participates in the events as a ‘causal agent’, which requires genuine involvement as opposed to the illusion sometimes offered by other media (Hanson 2018, p.29). He further argues that players can control a game’s temporality by pausing the game (Hanson 2018, pp.59-61, p.82). Similar to Thabet, Hanson contends that the possibility of saving games gives players the opportunity to return to earlier points in a fictional time-line (2018, pp.86-91). He claims that there are similar kinds of temporal control in both film and literature, but argues that games are nonetheless unique because of their interactive nature (Hanson, 2018, p.198).¹⁰

¹⁰ Note the circularity of this line of reasoning: games are interactive because they

Souvik Mukherjee is one of few philosophers discussing video game temporality. He draws on continental philosophers, such as Deleuze and Derrida, and stresses the ephemeral quality of the narrative that is the gameplay, and says that 'although the actual instance of the game might not be available again, the narrative is nevertheless recorded in diverse ways' (2015, p.104), mentioning video recordings as one means of doing so. He seems to suggest that the story disappears along with the narrative, possibly because otherwise one could access the story again by recreating the narrative, i.e. through playing the game again. Mukherjee downplays the differences between games and other media, yet concurs that a game like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (Ubisoft, 2003; henceforth *Sands of Time*), although set in the past, gives the player the sense that the events transpire now, and he goes on to argue that the difference between then and now is 'confused' by the game (2015, p.131).

Ultimately, even if time remains comparatively unexplored by game scholars, we can safely conclude that there it has been a prevailing idea that game stories take place in the present. The conception, however, that games are set in the present has not been elaborated upon in much detail.

1.2 Simultaneity of representation and its events

In this section I examine the argument that games could be thought of as taking place in the present because the events onscreen seem to occur at the same time as the audience/players perceive them. One reason why games could take place now is that players imagine they do. Currie discusses this question only in relation to cinema, but his conclusions can be applied to both games and films. He refers to, among others, Béla Balázs, Erwin Panofsky, and Metz, according to whom the film spectator believes that she is watching real events, occupying the position of

are unique, and they are unique because they are interactive.

the camera, which Currie calls Illusionism (Currie 1995a, p.23, p.26). According to Illusionism, if the spectator imagines watching the events, it follows that she is watching them *now* (Currie 1995a, p.201). Another theory presented by Currie is the one mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the so-called Imagined Observer Hypothesis, according to which the viewer imagines herself to be inside the fiction, occupying the place of the camera. Both views resemble those presented by game theorists in section 1.1, and similar conceptions of players as taking part in the fiction or performing it can be found among other game theorists.¹¹ It has also been adopted by some philosophers.¹² If we accept for the sake of argument that players imagine that they take part in the fiction, it follows that they imagine that it takes place now. If the audience/player is supposed to imagine that events take place now, one must consider what compels them to do this.

One possible explanation is that they are to imagine this because the images of the film/game are themselves in the present. Gideon Yaffe attempts to defend a thesis similar to Illusionism, and thinks that what needs to be clarified is whether films represent time automorphically or homomorphically, and if they do so strongly or weakly. The definitions of homomorphic and automorphic representation he takes from Currie, and Yaffe summarizes them as follows:

Representation R of event E *automorphically* represents E as having property P *if and only if* R's having property P represents E as having property P.

Representation R of event E *homomorphically* represents E as having

¹¹ See e.g. Wolf (2001d), Rehak (2003), Atkins (2003), Schott (2006), Davidson (2008), Servitje (2014), L. Joyce (2015, 2016), and Whaley (2018).

¹² See e.g. Cremin (2012), Meskin and Robson (2016, 2017), and Tavinor (2017). For objections, see Patridge (2017).

property P *if and only if* R's having a property of the same kind as P
represents E as having property P (Yaffe 2003, p.117; original emphasis)

Yaffe explains that mere correspondence between properties is not enough: the words 'black ink' are neither homomorphic nor automorphic, as the colour of the ink with which the words are written is not relevant to the content of the sentence (2003, p.118). However, Currie contends that text can be both auto- and homomorphic; whether it is differs from one occasion to another (1995a, pp.97-8). He explains that the sentence 'Fred is red' is *automorphic* if and only if the red colour of the words conveys the red colour of Fred, and it is *homomorphic* if and only if the red colour of the words conveys that Fred has some colour, but not necessarily the same colour as the words themselves (Currie 1995a, p.98). Currie also adds that what constitutes an automorphic representation can vary depending on the specificity at which one is operating. In his example with Fred, Currie says that the exact shade of the colour red of the sentence and of Fred respectively need not correspond to one another, it can suffice that both are some shade of red.

Yaffe then moves on to discuss what it would mean for a film to represent time auto- and homomorphically, and he abbreviates variables as follows:

'F is a collection of representations of events, such as a film; F consists of representations R_1, R_2, R_3 [...] such as a collection of images, that represent events E_1, E_2, E_3 [...] respectively; T is a type of property, such as duration [...]; and $T(x)$ is the token property, of type T, possessed by x' (Yaffe 2003, p.118).

He then presents the following definitions:

F *strongly* auto-/homomorphically represents T *if and only if* $\forall_k(R_k$
auto-/homomorphically represents E_k as having property $T(E_k)$) (Yaffe 2003;
p.118, original emphasis)

F *weakly* auto-/homomorphically represents T *if and only if* $\exists_k(R_k$
auto-/homomorphically represents E_k as having property $T(E_k)$) (Yaffe 2003;
p.119, original emphasis)

Although Yaffe does not mention games, it is evident that the same definitions can be applied to them in order to establish whether there is any correlation between the real and the fictional present. His example of a property represented is duration, but for current purposes we can let T be presentness; I treat duration in section 1.4. Hence, what we have to find out is whether games *strongly automorphically* represent presentness, i.e. if stories in games are necessarily represented as present by virtue of being conveyed by images located in the present.

Yaffe explains that sentences, written or oral, possess A-series properties, and there is a correspondence between the presentness of the utterance and its temporality: an utterance in the present tense claims that the events take place now, and the utterance is itself taking place now. However, Yaffe objects to any correlation imputed to the utterance and the temporal properties it conveys, as it will continue to represent the event as present, even when it becomes past itself (2003, pp.122-3). Yaffe then goes on to argue that the experience of witnessing a real event corresponds to that of watching images in films, and therefore the presentness of the film conveys presentness of the story (2003, pp.124-5). He claims that our visual experiences are usually simultaneous with the events experienced, thus representing the B-series property of simultaneity, and it is this simultaneity that informs us that what we experience has the A-series property of

being in the present. However, there are at least three flaws with Yaffe's reasoning.

The first is that it would entail that people who dream of past events – and possibly people with flashbacks in real life – would experience the very same events they remember, insofar as their dreams/flashbacks retain perfect phenomenal fidelity to the first time they experienced it; they experience the memory as present, so therefore the events within it are present. Yaffe's argument would thus make dreams – and, potentially, real flashbacks – cases of actual temporal regression.

The second flaw is that Yaffe speaks interchangeably of different temporal properties. Currie distinguishes between three temporal properties: those of the work, of the observer's experience, and of what the work represents (1995a, p.92). Yaffe conflates either the last two or all three, and undermines the distinction between a past event and the (present) representation of one, once more presuming that experience and temporality stand in a direct relation.

The third flaw is that, depending on which conception of time one adopts, Yaffe's claim either precludes anachronies, or is irreconcilable with assessments of which moment is the fictional present. If we adopt some kind of 'four-dimensionalism', and deny that there is a metaphysically privileged point in time, it follows that 'now' refers to 'the moment at which it is thought or uttered. So people at any location in space-time who believe that they exist in the present, will believe correctly' (Braddon-Mitchell 2004, p.199). This model is not available to Yaffe, as it is incommensurate with A-series properties. If we adopt a presentist view of time – that the only time that exists is the present – it follows that 'all that exists is the present, so the fact that we know we exist guarantees that we are in the present' (Braddon-Mitchell 2004, p.199). If the fictional present is the only time that exists,

the fictional present must be the moment we currently experience, as that is the moment to which we (and the characters) have epistemic access, but this would make anachronies inconceivable (since no past or future exists). However, Braddon-Mitchell notes, if we combine these two views and posit several hyperplanes (like fourdimensionalism) but maintain that only one of the regions of space-time is present (like presentism) it will be possible for people in the past to falsely believe that they are in the present (2004, p.200).

Given these flaws, it becomes clearer why Yaffe's assumption is unwarranted. As he has said himself, an utterance will always purport to be in the present, even when it recedes into the past. He then acknowledges the similarities between the utterance of a sentence and the experience of the moving image, in the sense that the simultaneity of the visual experience itself and the object seen (i.e. the image) will both recede into the past; however, he fails to realize that a character occupying a moment receding into the past may still (incorrectly) claim to be in the present. Hence, Yaffe seems to confuse A-series properties with B-series properties, or, alternatively, he is assuming that the former supervene on the latter; both are untenable in a defence of equating screen present with real present. He illustrates his point by saying that when, in real life, you see a bear running towards you, it is the simultaneity of the visual experience of the bear and the bear's running that conveys that the latter is happening in the present, even if said simultaneity is a relation that will always hold (Yaffe 2003 p.125). He thinks that it will always be true at other points in time that a bear was running towards you at the time that you saw it running, but that it was the 'now-ness' of the event that motivated you to run away at the time of occurrence, and not at another point in time. Yet, as is clear in this line of reasoning, it presupposes that there is a property such as 'now-ness' (as in a metaphysically privileged point in time) *and*

that this property can be derived from/supervenes on simultaneity; Yaffe fails to defend either of these and instead assumes both. Since there seems to be no reason to assume that simultaneity conveys temporal relations between *real* events and the perception thereof, we cannot apply it to the perception of *fictional* events.

Hence, when reading a book or watching a film we cannot assume that the story-present coincides with the time of reading/screening only with reference to the simultaneity of narrative presentation and our experience of it. Likewise, in a game narrative one cannot claim that the point one interacts with is the metaphysically privileged point in fictional time by virtue of the simultaneity of the playing and the experience of the story, because that simultaneity will always hold, even when the moment has receded into the past. At the beginning of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1998; henceforth *Ocarina of Time*) Link fights the spider Gohma, and the urgency of this situation is an eternal property of that one moment that will not disappear even as the player progresses and it recedes into the past, and we cannot deduce that this urgency is present only because we experience it in our own present. If we were to think that the game takes place in the past the urgency would nevertheless obtain because of the simultaneity of Link's experience of the event and the occurrence of it, just as one will always be compelled to run away from a charging bear at the moment one sees it, even when said moment as such is no longer present.

Furthermore, Yaffe maintains that events must take place at the time of observance and that this is usually the case in our everyday lives. He draws on George Berkeley, according to whom vision does not represent distance as such; rather, it is the visual experience of features – such as faintness and size – that leads to our belief that it is far away (Berkeley 1901, sections 44-5). By citing Berkeley's explanation of how we are conditioned to equate size with distance,

Yaffe appears to concede that we are equally conditioned to assume that present visual experiences correspond to present events, as becomes clear in the following example:

For instance, imagine that I look through a very powerful telescope after being told that the events that I will see unfolding happened many years earlier, many light-years away. If am [sic] able to shake off my habit of taking what I see to be happening now, then my visual experience will not represent the event it represents as present, but as past. Similarly, various facts about the placement of an image within a film can cause that image to represent the event it represents as past, even though it would have represented it as present in the absence of those contextual accompaniments. (Yaffe 2003, p.126)

Yaffe then mentions that a documentary could represent events as past, once the spectator knows that it is a documentary.

There are at least two ways in which Yaffe inadvertently undermines the validity of the CoP through the concession above. Firstly, if simultaneity is not indicative of presentness even between *real* events it follows that the very reason to assume any such correlation between real and *fictitious* events is arbitrary. Yaffe's own example is illustrative of this, as not even *real* experiences correspond to present events when the distance travelled by photons is large enough so as to 'distort' the impression, so that it no longer conveys temporal properties of that which is seen; we get the impression that the stars exist because our visual experience is simultaneous with their light reaching Earth, but this simultaneity obscures the fact that the stars may no longer exist.

Berkeley's example of distance further reinforces this conclusion, as distance is yet another property that spectators erroneously ascribe to objects represented in a film. The image is two-dimensional, and one could draw the

conclusion that it is only because of the conditioning pertaining to size explained by Berkeley that the viewer interprets objects as standing in different spatial relations to each other. There are numerous examples of how film-makers use this kind of conditioning in order to convey false information about the size of objects, such as how Frodo (Elijah Wood) in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001) appears to be smaller than many other characters, because Elijah Wood was placed further away from the camera. In the same way, *temporal* properties between objects and events can be distorted in films: clever use of shot-reverse-shot can hide the fact that two actors appearing to converse with one another were actually filmed at separate occasions. Shots of two different actors can also be combined so that they both appear within the same image and appear to be in the same place at the same time. Players may be led to believe that the events with which they interact must take place in the present because the representation reacts to their interaction in the present, but the events onscreen in a game need not share the 'now' of the player anymore than events depicted by a film, even though a filmic *representation* also shares the 'now' of the viewer.

This can be related to Murray's point about digital environments representing navigable space as opposed to portraying it (1997, p.79), and Ryan's taxonomy of video games, where the internal-ontological category allows players to change the fictional world whereas the internal-exploratory only allows them to inspect it without altering anything (2015, pp.164-5). Both argue that games take place now because players can explore their environments (although Ryan is aware that exploration does not necessarily mean that the player can alter anything). As has become clear, there is a difficulty in ascertaining the temporal properties of that with which one interacts: one cannot assume that the environment (or anything in it) shares the same 'now' as the person exploring it. Thus, it is irrelevant that the space is navigable and explorable, since it could still

be on another temporal plane than the player.

The second way in which Yaffe unwittingly undermines the CoP is how he assumes that we are conditioned to equate simultaneity with presentness, but can 'unlearn' to do it. This claim is debatable, as one arguably cannot learn to perceive present experiences as past events; stars watched through a telescope always appear to be present, even after we realize that they have disappeared. As Alon Chasid has argued, an experience does not change in nature if one learns that it is nonveridical (2014, p.405). An example of this would be how a *trompe-l'œil* still gives the same visual experience even after it has been revealed to be an illusion; Frodo does not seem larger once the spectator learns how the effect was achieved. If Yaffe is right and one could 'unlearn' to connect simultaneity and presentness, it would render the CoP even more arbitrary, as there is no necessary correlation between our experience and the temporal properties of the images and no way to distinguish when this correlation obtains. One could claim that images in films/games represent A-series properties weakly automorphically – i.e. *some* fictional events are portrayed as being in the present by virtue of being conveyed by images in the present – but this would be question-begging (it was that which Yaffe set out to prove); the representation will necessarily be in the present, yet Yaffe fails to show why this must indicate that some fictitious events must be as well, or why an A-series property of the representation can be linked to an A-series property of the fiction. If that were the case one could claim that literary narratives convey *colour* weakly automorphically insofar as the colour of some fictional objects corresponds to that of the text, but we would hardly say, for instance, that the colour of the eponymous feline in Poe's 'The Black Cat' (Poe, [1843]2015) is conveyed by the colour of the text. Likewise, we could posit that the presentness of Link's battle against Gohma happens to correspond to the presentness of the gameplay conveying it, but that the correlation is incidental.

Further, if the relation between the A-series properties of representation and story respectively is as arbitrary as Yaffe makes it out to be, one could just as well defend a *homomorphic* representation of A-series properties, claiming that all films and games are set in the past, and that the property of pastness is conveyed by virtue of the images' presentness.

Moreover, there are cases where the presentness of the image could be subverted by the salient pastness of the content represented. Le Poidevin (2016, p.324), Dubbelman (2011, p.163), and Sarah Cardwell (2003, p.86) mention characters' clothes as a means of conveying that events take place in the past, and Mukherjee implies something similar when saying that *Sands of Time* is set in the ancient past (2015, p.131) (a conclusion he does not motivate, but which we may nevertheless presume is based on the diegetic content such as clothes). If contextual markers are imperative for making a person perceive events as past, then presentness cannot be assumed to be the default setting only with reference to the presentness of images, because this quality will be retained even in the presence of contextual markers (such as clothes). If contextual markers automatically 'override' the impression of presentness, temporal properties of the images become redundant, as they will not alter the impression given by the content. If events are always presumed to be in the present the spectator/player would assume that films like *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972) and its game adaptation are actually set in the present (until they are told explicitly that they are not), that the stories are about present-day people who, for some inscrutable reason, dress and act as if they were living in the 1940s. With this in mind, temporal properties of images in films and games seem entirely superfluous, as it is ultimately the content of the fiction which determines when the story takes place. Another indicator of pastness overlooked by the scholars mentioned here is the presentation itself: the quality of the image and/or sound may indicate the age of

the film. Similarly, old games often have a lower resolution and/or framerate, and simpler animations.

In brief, if the presentness of the images can convey any temporal property – be it pastness or futurity – one cannot assume that they must necessarily convey presentness. Also, if our belief about the presentness of events is merely conditioned, it follows that the CoP becomes trivial and arbitrary: screened events take place in the present – in virtue of being screened in the present – except when they do not. Further, if experienced presentness is not indicative of the temporal relation between two events when both are either real or fictive, one cannot extrapolate that the experienced presentness reveals anything about temporal properties between a real and a fictive event, such as in the relation between a spectator/player and a film/video game. Lastly, the content of a fiction can inform the recipient about when the story takes place, which renders the temporal properties of the medium superfluous in the assessment of temporal properties of what is represented.

1.3 Duration

Another important issue is the duration of story events, i.e. the relation between the presentness of the fictional events and the actual present, and their progression in relation to one another. Yaffe argues that in films, the duration of a represented event generally corresponds to that of the cinematic image (2003, p.119), and that ‘the movement of the presentness of the image must represent the movement of the presentness of the represented event’ (2003, p.132). Even when duration is not represented automorphically (as in slow- and fast motion) Yaffe says it is still represented *homomorphically*: ‘The events are represented as occupying a certain amount of time by representing the “moving” presentness of the image as “moving” at a particular rate of speed that maps onto the rate of

progression of the “movement” of the presentness of the represented event’ (2003, p.131). Drawing upon Currie he asserts that the duration of a film sequence reveals something about the duration about the scene, if only weakly, i.e. that the event has *some* duration in virtue of the scene having it (Yaffe 2003, pp.119-20). In a related vein, Le Poidevin asserts that by equating fictional and real presentness with one another, *all* narrative episodes oblige the viewer to imagine that the fictional time is shifting successively as other events become fictionally present (2016, p.325). This, he explains, is not exclusive to anachronies, it obtains whenever time progresses, since progression entails that fictional time changes. Similar thoughts can be found elsewhere: Bordwell mentions that some scholars – for instance Metz – think that every shot of a film illustrates a continuous duration adhering to the temporal integrity of the events; temporal relations, they claim, are then conveyed through the relations between shots (2004, pp.205-6). Currie does not equate story time with fictional time in a strict sense, but does claim – similar to Metz – that the duration of individual shots in film conveys something about the duration of the action (1995a, p.102). The audience utilizes temporal properties of the representation (i.e. the film) to comprehend the temporal properties of the events represented (Currie 1995a, p.99).

However, there are problems with this conception of narrative time. It is clear that it does not apply to all media, as is illustrated when Genette elaborates on the possibility of a literary narrative whose duration corresponds to that of the story and asserts that it does not, and could only do so in a laboratory experiment where the reading speed must never vary (1980, pp.86-8). One could claim that this objection is invalid, as literary narratives do not possess temporal properties in virtue of their manifestation in a particular medium, as opposed to audiovisual narratives. Then it would possibly be true that game stories are in the present, because the duration of fictional time and play time could be synchronous. As will

become evident, however, there are other reasons why the Duration Assumption is equally problematic in game narratives.

1.3.1 Duration of story events

The Duration Assumption (though not referred to with this name) has been defended by, among others, Mukherjee, who notes that the duration of gaming-sessions often depends on the interaction of the players (2015, p.64, p.129), and Mark Wolf, who contends that the time experienced by the character and player must be congruous and that it is the player who decides how much time is to be spent in any given location (2001c, p.86). According to Zagal and Mateas this relation is not constant: in games segmented into rounds the fictional time distributed across the rounds may vary, so that one round may correspond to a single year of fictional time whereas another corresponds to 200 (2010, p.855). Similarly, Wei, Bizzochi, and Calvert assert that the standard in games is for story time and narrative time to be of the same duration, but they concede that there are exceptions, such as slow-motion (2010, pp.6-7). Note that this clearly contradicts Hanson's theory that the player can control the passage of time, since the flow of time cannot be *stopped* if the Duration Assumption is to obtain (i.e. if fictional and real time are to be isometric), it can only be extended or decreased.

Denying that duration must be determined by the player would be at variance with the CoP, because if fiction and reality are to be A-series aligned in the engagement with audiovisual narratives, the actual and fictional presents must be aligned (or 'mapped' to borrow Juul's terminology) throughout the entire screening/playthrough; a single moment of alignment would not suffice. This point cannot be emphasized enough: if the story takes place now, it cannot be for a singular moment; the aforementioned theorists seem to imply that this obtains for the game in its entirety, not for a limited time. This is a necessary consequence if

the fictional and actual timelines are to be A-series aligned, i.e. that the story takes place now, at the time of the screening/playing of the film/game: if video games are interactive because their stories are in the present, it follows that they must be in the present at every interactive moment, i.e. for the entire playthrough, meaning that the duration of the story is equivalent to the duration of the playthrough. The reason for this is simple: for every fictional event E there must be a corresponding interactive representation IR, in this case the image with which the player interacts, so events $E_1, \dots E_n$ always directly correspond to game images $IR_1, \dots IR_n$. For this reason it becomes obvious that if the duration of the story does not correspond to the duration of the narrative, we may conclude through *modus tollens* that the game cannot be in the present: the CoP necessitates the Duration Assumption, and if the Duration Assumption can be refuted, the CoP must be rejected as a consequence. In brief: if the player both creates and participates in the story, its duration cannot be fixed, because it would rupture the A-series alignment.

The first counterargument against Yaffe's and Juul's claim that the fictional present 'projects onto' the actual one is that it presupposes that they move in the same direction. In film-sequences played backwards this does not obtain, because then the fictional present moves *away* from the actual one, obviating mapping. The duration of the film played backwards and that of the event portrayed could still be coterminous, the point is only that they are not A-series aligned, as their respective presents do not align. The same phenomenon appears in games allowing players to 'rewind' time, such *Sands of Time*, *Braid* (Number None, 2008), and *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015). This shows that actual time does not 'project onto' fictional time with necessity, as Yaffe seems to think.

Moreover, the Duration Assumption becomes problematic when applied to films and games that purportedly have a temporal discrepancy between play time

and fictional time. Juul unwittingly presents theories that indirectly undermine the Duration Assumption. As mentioned earlier, he dissociates between what he calls fictional time – the time denoting events in the game world – and play time, i.e. the time experienced by the player, maintaining that these can but do not always coincide (Juul 2005, p.142-3). He mentions first-person-shooters as an example of games taking place in real-time, with a 1:1 correspondence between fictional time and play time, as opposed to games where time may move faster: in *SimCity* (Maxis, 1989), Juul explains, two minutes of play time can correspond to two years of fictional time, and in *Fifa 2002* (EA Canada, 2002), a match takes 45 minutes in the game, but only four minutes of play time (2005, p.143, p.151).¹³ As intuitive as this conception may seem, it is nonetheless irreconcilable with the CoP. If there is a discrepancy between play time and fictional time, it would follow that the present of each time-line (i.e. our own and that in the game) coincide only momentarily before drifting apart further and further as the game progresses. In a game with the kind of temporality found in *SimCity*, it would mean that play time and fictional time start out at the same moment, but since the fictional time elapses considerably faster, it follows that the ‘now’ of the story is moved further ahead in time, so that the player is interacting with events in the fictional future.

Naturally one could claim that there is no reason to assume that the ‘now’ of the respective times coincide *initially*, it would also be possible to posit that the game starts out in the past only for the ‘now’ of the fictional time to ‘catch up’ with that of the player, but this alternative only exacerbates the problem, as the discrepancy becomes twofold: first, the player supposedly interacts with past events, then, for an infinitesimally brief moment, the present of the fiction and that of the player coincide, and then we attain the same state as above, where the

¹³ Wolf (2001c, p.88) and Zagal and Mateas (2010, p.845, p.855) also note this kind of temporal discrepancy.

'now' of the fiction is incessantly moved farther away into the future. In either case, the 'now' of the story and that of the player would not be synchronous for long, they would coincide momentarily and then move further and further apart as the game progresses. As Juul's conception of interactivity presupposes that fictional time can be 'mapped' (2004, p.134) or 'projected' (2005, p.143) onto play time, it would follow that game stories cannot be interactive.

An additional critique is presented by Bordwell: he objects to the representation's purportedly necessary adherence to the temporal integrity of narrative events in films, claiming that the duration of the action can be compressed, even when the action takes place within a single shot (2004, pp.205-7). He further adds that neither is it necessarily possible to segment the action exactly, by which he means that there is no necessary and consistent correspondence between the duration of the representation and that of the action; as such, Bordwell stresses that in a continuous event which occupies a minute of screen-time and an hour of fictional time it does not follow that each second of screen-time corresponds to a minute of fictional time. This is in line with Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne's assertion that a fiction may leave the duration of an event indefinite (2016, p.239). It is not hard to find examples of this; Bordwell mentions *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948), which lasts 80 minutes and contains no ellipses, but covers several hours (2004, p.208). Other examples abound: in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (Weitz, 2009) the camera is circling around Bella in a single long take, and whenever the window through which she is staring enters the frame, nondiegetic text and the view from the window indicate that another month has passed. Similarly, in *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999) the four seasons come and go as Hugh Grant walks through the streets in one long take.

This does not contradict Currie's and Yaffe's thoughts about film-duration revealing something about story-duration, even if their theories initially appear to

be in line with the theories to which Bordwell objects, since neither makes a substantial claim. Both assert that the duration reveals *something*, but Currie admits that what is revealed could be trivial. As an example, he mentions how a shot of the Empire State Building may reveal little more than the fact that it stood unchanging during the point in time it is observed by the spectator (Currie 1995a, p.102). Currie appears to want to reach the same conclusion as that opposed by Bordwell, but admits that the correlation is not direct (as Metz would have it), and in so doing the elucidating potential of his theories diminishes, and can be reduced to the claim that the action represented possesses some kind of temporal property in virtue of being conveyed in a medium with some but not necessarily the *same* kind of temporal property (i.e. time is represented homomorphically); hence, details of the story's temporal properties cannot be deduced from the temporal properties of the narrative.

Nonetheless, one could claim that this has no impact on the ludologic representation if one argues that it is in virtue of the interactivity and not the audiovisuality that games possess their temporal properties. Audiovisuality could still be necessary for explicating the temporal properties of game stories – albeit not sufficient – but then one would have to answer the four follow-up questions presented in the introduction of the first chapter without constructing a circular argument.

Yaffe concedes that all anachronies (including ellipses) as well as slow- and fast motion rupture the alignment of A-series properties of fiction and reality (2003, p.133), so one must nonetheless explain why this is not detrimental to the CoP and the Duration Assumption, if presentness is the very concept that enables interaction. Wolf, for instance, asserts that games can compress time and include ellipses (2001c, p.86), but like Juul he seems unaware of the paradoxical consequences of this.

One possible solution is to not interpret theories like those of Juul and Wolf as literally as they appear to do themselves. Juul and Wolf seem to assume that one fictional year is of equivalent duration to one year in real life, even when the fiction is projected at such a speed that players perceive that entire year in a radically shorter time span. Juul and Wolf both illustrate this with the example that something taking only a couple of seconds of play time in *SimCity* (e.g. constructing a power plant) takes longer in the fictional time, as indicated by the in-game clock. Similarly, Juul mentions that the in-game clock in *Grand Theft Auto III* (2001; henceforth *GTA III*) indicates that it takes one minute of play time for one hour of fictional time to pass.¹⁴ However, Juul is aware of the problematic consequences following from this, and mentions that in *Fifa 2002* it takes David Beckham a second of actual time but twelve seconds of fictional time to run but a few meters, meaning that he actually moves very slowly and the representation has been 'sped up'. A similar example not mentioned by Juul is in *Vice City*, where it takes the protagonist Tommy Vercetti a couple of seconds in actual time to cross the street, but the in-game clock indicates that it takes several minutes of fictional time. Nevertheless, time cannot be 'sped up' in games if the game story is to be set in the present, events must occur in real time, and for that reason the story is not amenable to the same temporal disjunctions as other audiovisual media.

One thus has to explain the apparent discrepancy between play time and fictional time in games like the *GTA*-series if one maintains that game stories take place in the present. One possible solution to this dilemma is presented by Bourne and Caddick Bourne. They discuss fictions in which a character can 'freeze' time for everyone but themselves, so that they can move about as usual whereas others are stuck, immobile (Bourne and Caddick Bourne, 2016, p.83). They assert

¹⁴ In this respect *GTA III* is identical to *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (Rockstar North, 2002; henceforth *Vice City*). Having done more research on the latter I will refer to it throughout the discussion.

that time cannot freeze, as there would then be no time in which the character could act, so in fictions where people seem to do so they actually freeze the surrounding world, not the progression of time. One can extrapolate this explanation and conclude that if time never freezes but the world does, then by the same principle time does not speed up, the world does. We must then assume that it does take a couple of seconds to build a power plant in the world of *SimCity* and not, as Juul proposes, a significantly longer amount of fictional time, condensed into a shorter amount of play time; otherwise one must renounce the idea of games as taking place in the present. It does explain Tommy Vercetti's potentially slow movement in *Vice City*, but also introduces the issue of why the game clock moves so fast. Not only is this an implausible idea introduced to save the CoP, it also entails several problems.

The first question that arises is how to explain why fictional time is measured in the same units as in reality, even though their respective lengths differ. Advocates of CoP could claim that the measuring of fictional time is equivalent to how the same terms are always applied when measuring time on other planets in our galaxy. Though we may employ the same term to refer to the physical process of a planet's rotation around its own axis ('day'), it acquires different values depending on to which planet it refers (24 hours and two weeks with regard to Earth and Mars respectively). Naturally this has no consequences for temporal properties *per se*; time is not dilated on Mars.¹⁵ Similarly, in video games, we may use the same signifier for different signifieds: the length of a fictional minute may vary between games, but time passes at the same rate, even if the same temporal unit designates different amounts of time.

However, this solution presumes that games use the same units

¹⁵ Barring the insignificant time-dilation introduced by the theory of general relativity.

consistently, and this is not the case where different purportedly objective temporal markers co-exist: Juul notes that there is a discrepancy in *GTA III* between the in-game clock and a timer that appears occasionally, where twenty seconds of the timer correspond to twenty minutes of the fictional clock (2005, p.152); the same discrepancy exists in *Vice City*. The game thus indicates, on the one hand, that the in-game time progresses from 12pm to 12.20pm, i.e. that twenty minutes have passed, and on the other, the countdown timer counts twenty seconds. Juul is unable to resolve this issue, and here he cannot not use the solution presented above – that the same temporal units designate different amounts of time – because the game does the opposite by using two different units for the same amount of time.

Even if one disregards the problems of several indicators of time, and assumes that in the fiction the same temporal units refer to other quantities of time than we would in real life (i.e. that one hour really means one minute in *Vice City*), this solution remains problematic, as it leads to counterintuitive conclusions about the story-world. If days only last for a matter of minutes in *Vice City* it must have an impact on the world as a whole: for instance, it becomes difficult but necessary to explain how characters are able to carry out their quotidian chores during a day lasting a quarter of an hour. More importantly, nothing else in the fiction prescribes us to imagine that this temporal discrepancy obtains; *Vice City*, being a typical gangster-story, does not allow for such radical departures from reality, so it seems more reasonable to assume that the rapid progression of time is not a fictional truth, but rather a property of the presentation.

A more fundamental problem is crystallized when the progression of time is not consistent, as in games where the player seemingly has the ability to slow down and/or speed up time, such as *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, 2001), *Sands of Time*, and *Perfect Dark* (Rare, 2000). In these games time can be

slowed down to different extents, but they have in common that the movement of characters and objects alike is slowed down. According to the Duration Assumption, when the protagonists in these games move in slow-motion – such as when Max Payne hurls himself out of the way of bullets slowly soaring past him – the action is still depicted in real-time, meaning that bullets do not merely *appear* to take several seconds to reach their targets whilst actually travelling faster than indicated, their velocity has in fact been decreased temporarily (recall Bourne and Caddick Bourne’s assertion that time itself cannot be manipulated, only the world as such).

This introduces yet another problem: one cannot maintain that things really do move at a faster pace in games where temporal progression varies, as that would require an explanation of the kind that the protagonist is endowed with some kind of supernatural power enabling him to control the velocity of all things visible, which is not true in *Max Payne* or *Perfect Dark*. Bourne and Caddick and Bourne’s interpretation of the world as frozen – as opposed to time itself – is motivated by limitations of *actual* time, and they seem to disregard possible discrepancies between actual and fictional worlds, but it would be wrong to assume that fictional temporality must be identical in nature to the actual one. Le Poidevin speculates on what properties of time are essential and which are merely contingent (2016, p.329), and while he does not mention the possibility of slowing down time, this distinction is nevertheless pertinent for present purposes: the only reason time could not slow down in fiction is if it were an essential feature of time that it cannot do so, and even then one could claim that a story where time can be slowed down – in spite of it being an essential feature that it cannot – is still conceivable, so long as one accepts that there can be fictions with true contradictory and/or inconceivable propositions, so-called ‘impossible fiction’. Regardless of whether time could possibly slow down there is no reason to

endorse Bourne and Caddick Bourne's assertion that it is the objects and not time itself that are slowed down since it clearly lacks support from the stories of games which do not account for their temporal manipulation in terms of, for instance, supernatural powers. The more intuitive conclusion supported by many of the aforementioned games is that it is the player, not the character, who has the ability to slow down the *representation*, not the actual characters and objects, and therefore that there is a discrepancy between actual and fictional time; i.e. the story is not in the present.

We may then conclude that the progression of the fictional 'now' does not correspond to the actual one, because temporal indicators such as timers and clocks cannot be explained with regard to what time they are supposed to indicate, and because variation in the temporal properties of the representation (e.g. slow-motion) is at variance with the idea that fictional and actual presents move at the same speed.

1.3.2 Separating the CoP and the Duration Assumption

One could object that the player need not influence the duration of the story, that it is possible to retain the CoP whilst abandoning the Duration Assumption. Even if one believes that the player creates and participates in a story that takes place in the present, one could argue that story duration is one of the factors not controlled by the player; the game story lasts for a fixed amount of time, regardless of the length of the narrative conveying it. Something similar is said by Abbott, as he distinguishes between what he calls clock time and narrative time, and asserts that the clock time in the story is not necessarily prolonged even when narrative time is, for instance through the addition of more information (2008, pp.4-5). He does not refer to video games, yet it is possible that problems related to duration would disperse if the same principle obtains in them. If so, the story takes place now, but

duration is not one of the properties controlled by the player, just as she may not always control the looks of the avatar, or in which order to play the levels. Similar thoughts have been expressed by Le Poidevin who, as noted earlier, claims that we usually think of fiction as independent of our engagement with it and that not everything imagined by the recipient of a narrative translates into fictional truth (2016, p.323-5).¹⁶ Nevertheless, though Abbott's and the others' assertions could obtain in non-interactive representations like films, it seems like a less viable option in games if they are to remain interactive, for at least two reasons.

First of all, it would necessitate a contradictory temporality where the 'now' progresses with the same speed in both timelines, yet it nevertheless retroactively becomes the case that the real and the fictional 'now' did *not* progress with the same speed when the screening/playthrough is over; present-tensed propositions would acquire a truth-value different to that of past-tensed propositions in spite of conveying the same facts. For instance, it would be true, when playing *Ocarina of Time*, that it takes Link n hours to save Zelda and, once Link has succeeded, it did *not* take n hours. Another solution could be sought in mereology: one could deny that the temporal sum supervenes on its parts, so that two sums may be different in spite of being made up of the same constituents. This would mean that an equal number of moments of the same duration are added to both the fictional and the actual timelines, but they still end up being of different sizes. Both of these solutions are contradictory, counterintuitive, and primarily motivated by a desire to save the CoP.

Second, if story content is 'added' by the player and distributed within a fixed time frame, it would lead to improbabilities in the game stories in terms of how many events occurred in a given amount of time, and would diminish the

¹⁶ So do Currie (1990, p.72), Walton (1990, pp.58-9), and Patridge (2017, pp.181-3).

verisimilitude – possibly the very *conceivability* – of the story: it would entail that an unreasonably high/low number of actions are accommodated by a comparatively small/large time frame. Before the reason for this can be explained, a taxonomy of time in games is required.

Many story-driven action/adventure games seem to have one out of two kinds of temporalities: in the first kind, time always elapses at the same rate, regardless of what happens in the game. This model appears in, for instance, *Ocarina of Time* and *Vice City*, where the flow of time is independent of player action, so that days and nights pass at a consistent pace in fictional time as the player progresses through the game. We can call this *fluid time*. In the second kind, time is fixed in relation to a given narrative passage. In *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005) and *Half-Life 2* (Valve, 2004) some sections will always take place in daytime, and the day will last for as long as it takes the player to get to the end of the stage, and not turn into night until she has progressed. We can call this *fixed time*.¹⁷

Several problems arise regardless of which temporality a game adopts. If a game has *fixed time*, there are two possible solutions as to why the first day in *Resident Evil 4* lasts anything between one and a potentially infinite number of hours (depending on how long it takes for the player to finish the level). The first would be to postulate an idiosyncratic temporal dynamic in the story where the passage of time varies, i.e. the first day lasts one hour and the second one lasts thirty hours, because that is how long it takes for the player to finish those parts of the game. However, that means that a given day in the story could last any theoretical amount of time, and this lacks support in the story; we are never told that days vary severely in length in the fiction. It is rendered even more unlikely by the fact that different players will spend different amounts of time in any given

¹⁷ Although more categories may exist, these suffice for current purposes.

segment, so the length of a given day/night in the story will vary between players and playthroughs.

The second solution is that the duration of the day is constant, regardless of how long it takes the player to finish it, but that means that an infinite number of events could be compressed into a finite time-segment. In *Resident Evil 4* and *Half-Life 2* the player could meander for a potentially infinite amount of real time, but the same amount of fictional time would have passed in the story. One would then have to be forced to invoke the same kind of temporal compression mentioned by Juul, but as has already been shown, this would go against the notion of the story taking place in real-time. Furthermore, temporal compression would entail the same kind of perplexing conclusion attained by Juul regarding the speed of events, i.e. that the story events are portrayed as if they play out at the same speed in the story as they would in real time when in fact the temporal progression has been altered, so the impression that the game is in real-time is merely ostensible. As already mentioned, Juul speculated that since 45 minutes in *Fifa 2002* take 4 minutes to play, events must have been sped up, so that the football-players are in fact moving much slower in the fictional world (2005, p.152). In *Resident Evil 4* and *Half-Life 2* the opposite would be true: the characters seem to move at the speed of a normal person in real life, when in fact they (and everything else in the story world) are moving at a superhuman speed. In order to retain temporal congruity it would have to follow that the velocity of fictional events increases proportionally with the duration of the play time, meaning that the longer the player takes to complete a section, the faster the characters have to move in the story so as to allow the fixed time-frame to accommodate the events. In *Half-Life 2* and *Resident Evil 4*, as opposed to *Vice City*, no consistent correlation between play time and fictional time can be asserted, as the relation between story time passed and time required for the player to finish a certain level will invariably

differ between stages; one level may be finished in a comparatively short amount of time, diminishing the temporal discrepancy, whereas segments where the player needs more time said discrepancy would increase proportionally. Nothing in *Resident Evil 4* or *Half-Life 2* indicates that this temporal discrepancy exists to begin with, nor that it varies. Briefly, if a story segment is said to take place during a single hour it would be difficult to 'make sense' of the segment and its content if it takes the player more/less than 60 minutes to finish it.

A similar problem occurs in games with *fluid time*. Wolf claims that games do not have a fixed running time in the way films do (2001c, p.91). He may be right about running time, but as stated by Abbott above, prolongation of narrative time need not influence story time, so the question remains of what relation obtains between story and narrative in game narratives. Perhaps the story's duration is extended when the narrative's duration is. The story of *Ocarina of Time* could be prolonged for a potentially infinite amount of time, taking anything between a week and several years of story time, as nothing indicates the contrary. Whilst this could be true of some game stories, it is less plausible in others. In *Vice City* the omnipresent in-game clock indicates how much fictional time has passed, and while it is possible that the protagonist Tommy Vercetti spends several days trying to complete any given mission – as a result of a particular player spending more time playing it – it seems unlikely that something like a car-chase could last for weeks of story time only because it takes a player hours of play time. Further temporal discrepancies arise if the player retries the same section (or replays the game) and does not finish it in the same time as the first try. Repetition is an almost inevitable part of games, and retries are likely to be of different lengths, indicating that the same events took different amounts of time.

Moreover, in *Ocarina of Time* this complexity is exacerbated as it contains both fixed and fluid time: when Link is in a town time will not pass, when he is

outside it does. This cannot be explained with reference to the magic that pervades the story; ontological conundrums in fairy-tales cannot be resolved by appealing to magic only to save the CoP and Duration Assumption, and stories like those in *Resident Evil 4* and *Half-Life 2* make no open reference to anything – magic or technology – that justifies such a conception of time.

Another problem is how the combination of the CoP and the Duration Assumption renders ellipses impossible: since play time corresponds to fictional time, no jump forward in time can take place, because that would violate the correlation between the two temporal currents. When the narrative cuts from one scene to another, the following scene must take place immediately after the first if story time and playtime are to remain synchronous. As argued earlier, temporal compression is not a viable option. Juul and Wolf could argue that ellipses are different from anachronies, but Currie asserts that they are both a kind of temporal violation (1995a, p.220), so treating ellipses differently would be manifestly *ad hoc* on their part. The result is that ellipses are merely ostensible in games, meaning that everything in their narratives occurs in real time. Unseen passages of transportation from one location to another must be interpreted, not as longer periods of time with implied information, but as unexplained, instant teleportation from one location to another, with inexplicable alterations (misleadingly) indicating the passage of time (e.g. clocks indicating that several hours have passed).

Films are replete with ellipses; we are rarely shown the entire journey from point A to point B. Film theorists defending the Duration Assumption could object, as they claim that temporal integrity must be retained *within* a segment, not *between* them, but this may be *ad hoc*, as many scenes consisting of several shots do retain temporal integrity in the sense that cuts are instantaneous; often no time passes between two consecutive shots if they are parts of the same scene. As was clear in Bordwell's explanation, it is the content of a shot that

determines the progression of time, yet Bordwell does not acknowledge that this is *always* the case, within as well as between shots: two consecutive shots are deemed to take place in instant succession (i.e. no time passes in the cut between them) if the content indicates this, for instance if we cut from one person to another in a continuous dialogue. The shots take place further apart in time if the content gives this impression, for instance if the sun is rising in shot number 1 and setting in shot number 2. What Bordwell fails to point out is the general rule of content indicating passage of time, both within and between shots, which is why film theorists defending the Duration Assumption are wrong in stating that temporal manipulation takes place between shots. This means that ellipses are still possible between shots, but not for reasons advocated by film theorists. For this reason, both the Duration Assumption and ellipses can obtain in films, albeit not in conjunction with one another.

However, in games ellipses cannot be used at all because, as explained above, the story would then no longer take place now, but in the future, or, alternatively, in a less distant past. This has awkward consequences for many (if not most) game stories: in *Ocarina of Time*, when the young Link enters the Temple of Time and acquires the Master Sword, he falls into a deep slumber and is awakened seven years later, whereupon he is informed by an old man (a 'sage') that his spirit was sealed away for some time so that he had time to grow up. If the game takes place in the present and play time corresponds to fictional time, this cannot be true (meaning that the sage is lying), because Link has in fact been asleep for a brief moment (as long as his slumber lasts in the *narrative*), and there is some unknown reason as to why he has grown up; nor is it explained why the rest of the world has changed with him, giving the impression that seven years have passed.

Furthermore, factors depending on the player's ability to travel back and

forth in time must be interpreted in counterintuitive ways when the Duration Assumption is applied: as a kid, Link can plant a magic seed which grows into a plant when he travels forward seven years in time. If gameplay is synchronous with duration, it means that the amount of time needed for the plants to grow is arbitrary, because, as already noted, seven years only pass ostensibly. The player could spend weeks, even *years* of fictional time as young Link without the plant growing, but as soon as he visits the Temple of Time and ‘travels forward in time’ (ostensibly), the plant will inexplicably have grown, even though it takes a couple of seconds for the transformation from young to old Link to be completed.

Bourne and Caddick Bourne provide a possible explanation: they suggest that in *any* fiction with time travel, we are not shown a singular person travelling through time, but several people from various time-lines who have ‘quasi-memories’ that happen to correspond to what happened to people from the time-lines up until then (2016, pp.132-3). Thus, they explain, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) does not really travel back in time in *Back to the Future* (Zemeckis, 1985), but instead the spectators are shown two almost identical people in different possible worlds, one of which erroneously believes that he has travelled back in time. Bourne and Caddick Bourne use this explanation to solve ontological problems stemming from paradoxes of time travel, but it could potentially be applied to our current issues. However, most narratives do not prescribe imagining several possible worlds, so this would be a counterintuitive solution resorted to primarily to salvage the Duration Assumption and the CoP. Further, positing possible worlds would not resolve the issues of temporal compression/dilation *within* a segment either, such as the in-game clock of *Vice City*, or when the progression of time is reversed, as in *Sands of Time*. The only way to apply it would be to claim that at each instant we are transported to a new possible world, an interpretation not supported by most cinematic and ludologic fiction. Moreover, that would still leave

the combination of fluid and fixed time in *Ocarina of Time* unexplained.

Thus, the problems of duration remain. The CoP and the Duration Assumption necessitate one another, but are equally incompatible in films and games, with further problems added to the latter: if the duration of story time is fixed and it is to correspond to screen/play time, all players would have to complete the game in exactly the same amount of time. Related to this is Genette's speculation on how literature could potentially establish the same temporal relation between narrative time and story time as films are presumed to have, so that reading time corresponds to story time, but he says that this would require reading at a constant speed with no variations. It seems as if games, just as literature, may not have a fixed relation between fictional time and reading/play time. This would be in line with the claims of Le Poidevin, Currie, and Patridge, namely, that not everything imagined translates into fictional truth.

Hence, we may draw the conclusion that just as in literature and cinema, the duration of a game story stands in no necessary correlation to the time of the narrative. It may take players different amounts of time to complete each stage, but the time passed in the story remains the same, just as it may take readers different amounts of time to read the same page without that affecting the duration of the fictional events, or how a shot in a film may last for a longer or shorter amount of time than the event depicted. This makes the combination of the CoP and the Duration assumption untenable. However, neither is tenable even on their own, so it seems more propitious to give them up and accept that games are not set in the present and that their stories, for *that* reason, cannot be said to be interactive.

1.4 Future truth

A topic related to the CoP is the truth-value of future-tensed propositions. If the

game story takes place now and the player is able to interact with the story, it follows that the fictional future cannot be fixed. Conversely, if the fictional future *is* fixed, players cannot alter the truth-value of future-tensed propositions, which in turn obviates interaction with the story.

Some game theorists allude to this question. Juul claims that a description of future events prevents the player from doing anything, and that games give the impression that upcoming events are not determined (2001). Gareth Schott contends that agency is a matter of bringing about future events, not just predicting or expecting them (2006, p.139). As mentioned in the introduction, Zagal and Mateas argue that players influence events in the future (2010, p.845). Similarly, Colin Cremin asserts that the outcome in games is not predetermined (2012, p.81). Mukherjee agrees when he argues that ‘the end of a game is impossible to predict’ (2015, p.132), and that each playthrough has numerous different endings (2015, p.137). By contrast, Jan Simons notes that although game scholars think that the game’s outcome is ‘hidden in the future’ (2007) and that it for this reason can be influenced by the player, in actuality only some outcomes are possible; the fact that the player may not be aware of which these outcomes is merely a phenomenological aspect (2007). Similarly, Holmes contrasts nonlinear games with linear ones, explaining that in the latter ‘future events are set before the game has even begun’ (2012, p.216). Contrary to these views, Torben Grodal contends that *cinema* is a medium apt for giving the impression that the fictional future is undecided, and that even in a medium in which the narrative is fixed the recipient may still have the experience that the fictional future is not (2003, p.137-8).

Le Poidevin discusses the concept of fictional future in greater depth than the game scholars above. He explores what he calls the ‘Fixed Fictional Future thesis’ (2007, p.142), or FFF for short, according to which some fictions contain

true, future-tensed propositions. He argues that in *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623), we get the impression that it is inevitable that the eponymous hero becomes king and that this was, if not true, then at least *inevitable* at the encounter with the witches telling him about it (2001, pp.70-2, 2007, pp.142-3). He also mentions *Time and the Conways* (Priestley, 1937) as an example of a fiction where only the audience has a vision of the future – the second act takes place after the third – and asserts in this case the future is fixed as well, since when we watch the third act we already know what the events will eventually lead up to (2007, p.143). In contrast, according to the open future hypothesis, the future does not exist and is therefore indeterminate, consisting of a set of possibilities (Le Poidevin 2016, p.316).¹⁸ With respect to film, he explains, the fictional future's openness partly depends on the location of the fictional present in relation to the 'screen present', i.e. the image currently projected. Le Poidevin argues that if the fictional future is open, the screen present can only show the fictional present or past, since only they contain determinate facts; if the fictional future is open there would be nothing to show, since it does not exist yet (2016, p.318). However, he continues, if we assume that the screen present is in the fictional past, it follows that the events following the screen present are determinate, because the fiction is complete before we access it (Le Poidevin 2016, pp.321-2). In addition, Le Poidevin briefly considers interactive fictions, originally asserting that they are as closed as non-interactive ones (2001, p.90), but later on nuances this and says that their potentially unfixed nature could depend on whether the player is a coauthor or not, and concludes that players could nevertheless have erroneous beliefs about fictional facts (2007, pp.160-1) (whether players can be seen as authors will be treated in the next chapter).

¹⁸ Le Poidevin does not give the open future hypothesis an abbreviation. For the sake of simplicity I will call it the OFF for short, to contrast it with the FFF.

Bourne and Caddick Bourne criticize Le Poidevin for assuming that information about upcoming events necessarily reveals anything about the the fictional world's metaphysical structure (2016, p.47).¹⁹ They argue that, in *Macbeth*, it is not necessarily true at the time Macbeth hears the prophecy of the sisters that he will become king in the sense that it is not true at this stage that the latter stage (at which he is king) already exists. Instead, this is a way of simultaneously representing two stages of the fictional world (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, pp.45-6). Another alternative considered by Bourne and Caddick Bourne is to limit the prophecy to how the *representation* will develop in order to elicit certain expectations from the audience, without encompassing truths about the fictional future (2016, p.46). In brief, they underline the difference between, on the one hand, the representation of fixity, and on the other, the fixity of representation (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.47). They further add that whatever makes future-tensed propositions true need not be located in the present (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.44). Therefore, even if it is true that Macbeth will become king, it does not follow that this was true at the time it was foretold by the sisters (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, pp.46-7). Likewise, they argue that even though the second act of *Time and the Conways* takes place after the third act (and even though we know that the acts describe the same events in the same fictional world) it is nevertheless not already true in the fictional time of Act III that the fictional future will be as illustrated by Act II (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.49). Although this does not mean that the future is fixed, it nevertheless does not prevent the audience from interpreting the narrative differently than if the events had been shown in chronological order, since knowledge of later events can be used when evaluating earlier ones (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016,

¹⁹ They may have misunderstood Le Poidevin, as he claims that the *narrative's* determined nature does not entail that *story events* are predetermined (2001, p.73, 2007, p.144).

pp.49-50). In brief, 'metaphysics cannot straightforwardly be read off features of the representation' (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.128).

1.4.1 Characters with foreknowledge of the future

Both Le Poidevin and Bourne and Caddick Bourne discuss characters making predictions. Bourne and Caddick Bourne are at pains to make the future open in *Macbeth*, saying that even if Macbeth becomes king, it does not follow that this was true at the time the sisters told him about this. They suggest that the sisters inform the audience on how the representation will develop, that they are watching a fiction in which Macbeth will be king, but that this information does not pertain to the fictional world's metaphysical structure (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.47). If we adopt this line of reasoning and apply it to the Prince's premonitions of the future in the *Sands of Time*, one could argue that the visions only pertain to gameplay and not the story. However, it is problematic to claim, as Bourne and Caddick Bourne do, that a proposition is true at a time prior to the events to which they refer without, at the same time, drawing the conclusion that the fictional future is fixed and/or that it already exists. Bourne and Caddick Bourne do not explain how a premonition could be true only about the representation and not the fiction, seeing how the witches are themselves part of the fiction, as is Macbeth (who hears this prophecy too). Similarly, the Prince's visions in *Sands of Time* are not exclusively available to the player; it is fictionally true that the Prince sees future events. Thus, we can rule out this solution, as it would eliminate the difference between fictions where information about the future is available only to the audience and where fictional characters share this knowledge; it is evident in the context that we are supposed to understand that the witches and the Prince are prescient.

One could object that it was the very act of telling Macbeth about his future

that made him pursue it, making it a self-fulfilling prophecy, but if we maintain this whilst denying that their prediction was true at the time of telling they cannot be said to possess genuine knowledge of his future coronation, only justified belief. Besides, they successfully predict events beyond Macbeth's control, indicating that their predictions are in fact true. Moreover, if it is predetermined that Macbeth will be king and the witches know this for the reason that it is predetermined, we can also presume that it was predetermined that they would tell him about this. One must not forget that the witches themselves (and their predictions) are part of the timeline; that the predictions also have a causal role in the fictional chain of events is a different matter. Similarly, if we deny that future-tensed propositions are true in *Sands of Time*, the Prince would have no knowledge about upcoming events, but would suffer from hallucinations that serendipitously happen to correspond to what would have become true later on even if he had not had the visions. Naturally one could insist that both Macbeth and the Prince are deluded and that the future was never closed to begin with, that their prophecies are self-fulfilling, but this would not make game stories more interactive. If the prerequisite for interaction is that the given story has an open future, we still have no explanation as to why *Macbeth* is not as interactive as *Sands of Time*, even though the fictional future is equally open in both.

Another point Bourne and Caddick Bourne try to make is that even if the prophecy is true, it does not follow that the later stage of which the witches speak already exists. Similarly, Le Poidevin argues that from the fact that a given event comes to pass it does not follow that it was always true that it *was going to* come to pass (2001, p.73).²⁰ This distinction between a future event being true and being

²⁰ Cf. D'Alessandro, who claims that by producing a sequel it becomes true already in the first part that future events will occur (2016, p.57). However, his poor defence of this claim poses no challenge to Le Poidevin's theory. For criticism of D'Allessandro, see Motoarcă (2017).

'merely' inevitable is a crucial one; even if we presume that the future does not exist it does not entirely refute the FFF. We would have an A-series where people are bound to act in a certain way, making the future inevitable/predetermined, without making future-tensed propositions true. This would allow us to maintain that games take place in the present, but even when ignoring the numerous problems already mentioned in relation to this in previous sections, it *still* would not follow that the player can alter the story. The Prince's flash-forwards in *Sands of Time* entail that even if we *had* accessed the story at the time it took place, we still would not have been able to influence the course of events. Failing to bring about the events in the Prince's premonitions would be no different from failing to show the right film-reels when screening a film, it would not affect the fictional truth.

A game that takes place in the present and includes flash-forwards would in principle be no different from games including flashbacks. As Juul admits himself, flashbacks do not allow for players to alter the story, but we cannot endorse a certain conception of game temporality only on the grounds that we would rather have interactive stories; our preferences are irrelevant. This proves that it is irrelevant where the fictional present is located in relation to the screen present: if the fictional future in relation to the screen present is fixed, nothing is changed by the theory that the screen present and fictional present are aligned, we still cannot interact with the story. This proves that games are not interactive by necessity, because even a story supposedly set in the present can be fixed.

1.4.2 Non-diegetic premonitions

Stories that contain flash-forwards but lack premonitions on the part of a fictional character present other problems. Here opinions differ once more, and Le Poidevin and Bourne and Caddick Bourne devote much attention to the concept of

'fictional authors' (or 'implied authors'),²¹ and what these know about future events. However, this concept is irrelevant for the discussion; it is not pertinent whether we conceive of truth in fiction as that which is believed by the implied or the real author as long as we emphasize that what is fictionally true is what the reader is prescribed to imagine.

It is problematic to maintain, as Bourne and Caddick Bourne do, that flash-forwards are not true in the present, even when they are only accessed by the audience, and this becomes more evident when related to definitions of truth in fiction. As Stock notes, drawing on David Velleman, an open fictional future is precluded when the interpreter is encouraged to imagine that such-and-such will be the case, because when one does so 'effectively it is as if *it is already a completed state of affairs that such-and-such will be the case*' (2017, p.23; original emphasis).²²

Moreover, unless we state that Act II is true in Act III it would be problematic to claim, as Bourne and Caddick Bourne do, that we may utilize knowledge gained from representations of upcoming events in our interpretation of current ones, and that this hindsight may highlight facts we otherwise might not have noticed, had the scenes been shown in chronological order (2016, pp.49-50). This seems contradictory: on the one hand they allow for use of knowledge from flash-forwards, on the other, they deny that this would make the future fixed. If the future, however, is not fixed, events in the flash-forward are not guaranteed to take place, which in turn precludes possibilities of utilizing knowledge gained from it. There is no reason to presume that we may apply knowledge gained from Act II

²¹ For more on implied authors, see e.g. Currie (1990, 1995a), Kania (2007), and Kindt and Müller (2011).

²² However, Stock neglects the distinction between imagining that something will be true and the *possibility* that it will be true. Stock's argument entails that *any* imagination pertaining to future events precludes an open future, which obviously is not true when spectators are encouraged to adopt certain expectations which are subverted later on.

when watching Act III if the events in Act II are not true *in* Act III. This would refute their own claim that the flash-forward informs the audience that they are watching a fictional world where the events in the flash-forward take place, since the future, being open, could be altered so that those events never occur. Alternatively, we could question that Act II and III represent the same possible world (an unlikely theory Bourne and Caddick Bourne reject in this particular case, but which they nonetheless consider in relation to other fictions). Further, if knowledge of future events were always sufficient for analyses of present ones, even when future events are not true in the present, it would follow that we are *always* able to use knowledge about events in the fictional future regardless of whether one construes the fictional future as open or not. For instance, when seeing a film for a second time we may use knowledge gained from the first screening, for instance in order to study the careful foreshadowing of upcoming plot-twists and revelations, but such an examination is clearly inappropriate in some sense (we are not prescribed by the film to study the preparation of upcoming twists), and we intuitively presume that knowledge of future events is necessary only in narratives where these are shown, not otherwise.²³ When watching *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941) it is obvious that we should not know to what 'Rosebud' alludes at the beginning of the film and, for that reason, may not employ our knowledge about this, should we have acquired it anyway prior to the screening.

Secondly, if it is not true in Act III that the events of Act II will take place even though we see Act II before Act III, it becomes unclear what Bourne and Caddick Bourne believe *would* make the future fixed. As Le Poidevin notes, not even an explicit statement about fictional temporal properties would suffice since

²³ Walton (1990, p.261) agrees, but Ryan (2015, p.106) objects that one can only suspend disbelief, not knowledge. However, she neglects that it is nevertheless not *fictional* that *p* will occur even if we know that the narrative will *convey p* later on.

interpreters are cautious to take any fictional statement at face value (2007, pp.159-60). This conundrum is equally problematic for establishing any properties pertaining to the fixity of the fictional future, as it would make fictions with and without fixed futures practically indistinguishable. Bourne and Caddick Bourne claim that the open or fixed nature of the fictional future is determinate but underdetermined, due to lack of information on this matter; it is one or the other, but we cannot say which (2016, p.64). This, however, would refute their own assertion that the future-tensed propositions in *Time and the Conways* lack truth value as this conclusion of theirs presumes that the fictional future is open, but the lack of evidence for a closed future is in itself not sufficient for proving the contrary; what they have really established is the difficulty of ascertaining the nature of the fictional future in general. As for *Time and the Conways*, and similar narratives, they have not disproved the FFF, nor proved the OFF.

On the other hand, Bourne and Caddick Bourne may be too sceptical in their attempted refutation of the FFF. The fixity of the future is never portrayed as *such*, but it follows from the use of flash-forwards, and it is dubious whether it could be conveyed in any other way. Bourne and Caddick Bourne are certainly correct in their assertion that 'metaphysics cannot straightforwardly be read off features of the representation' (2016, p.128), but as Currie notes, cinema cannot represent certain temporal properties (1995a, p.218), and though he does not mention fixity/openness of the fictional future, this could be one of those properties. If so, the failure to portray one of these features cannot in and of itself be taken as evidence for its converse or its negation. That is, if fiction *f* fails to represent the fictional future as open, it does not follow that the fictional future is *not* open, nor does it follow that the fictional future for that reason is closed, because those properties cannot be portrayed at all.

Nevertheless, the fact that metaphysical properties cannot be read off

straightforwardly does not mean that a narrative structure never reveals anything; the objection that a property of the representation need not express a fictional truth, although true, is trivial, because sometimes it arguably does, and it would be a false dichotomy to put beliefs about the representation and the fiction respectively in necessary opposition with one another in the way Bourne and Caddick Bourne seem to imply in their criticism of Le Poidevin. Moreover, films and novels *usually* use the order of scenes to convey the order of fictional events (the order of scenes and/or shots often corresponds to the order of fictional events), anachronies and scenes shown 'backwards' (as if rewind) being *exceptions* to this rule; even a film like *Memento* (Nolan, 2000), where scenes are shown in a non-chronological order, represents events chronologically *within* each scene. When the order of fictional events is presented non-chronologically it is intuitive to assume that it is done for a reason, potentially that features of the representation *do* reveal something about fictional metaphysics. Thus, although Bourne and Caddick Bourne are right in asserting that metaphysical properties are not necessarily revealed by those of the representation, it is not universally applicable; it does not pertain to all fictions, nor to all fictional metaphysical properties.

The fact that fictional metaphysical properties are not always conveyed by actual properties of the representation also shows why we cannot assume that games have an open future: if we cannot presume that the fictional future is fixed only because the representation is, it follows that we, conversely, cannot presume that the fictional future is *not* fixed only because the representation is not. This means that game scholars who presume that the fictional future is open with reference to the non-fixed nature of video games make the same erroneous assumption that Bourne and Caddick Bourne accuse Le Poidevin of doing, but by assuming its negation: they mistake the *non-fixity of representation* for the

representation of non-fixity.

A third problem with the claim that it is not fictional in Act III that the events in Act II will follow is that it would arguably elicit the wrong expectations from interpreters. It would mean that after a flash-forward the audience would *not* be expected to utilize the information it provides but instead should hope that the future events will perhaps not come to pass after all (since it is not fictionally true that they will). This would be counter-intuitive and would dissolve the essential difference between narratives where tension is established through lack of certainty regarding the outcome of a chain of events and those where interpreters know from the start how the story will end and instead take an interest in *how* that came to be.

Alternatively, if it is true that the events in Act II will take place, but not true in the fictional time of Act III, there are two solutions: the first is that the events in Act II are not true in Act III, but it is true in Act III that the events it portrays are disposed in such a way that they will inevitably lead to the events in Act II. That way we could have a fictional A-series with an open future – since Act II does not exist yet, which it would have done if it were a B-series – but then we are immediately presented with the problem of how to explain the representation of Act II; if it does not exist and is indeterminate it should be blank, as explained by Le Poidevin above: if the fictional future is truly open we would not be able to see it, since any determinate content would make the future equally determinate (Le Poidevin 2016, p.318). Furthermore, by introducing this kind of predestination the fictional future becomes closed anyway, so in effect this would be no different from saying that the events in Act II are already true. This predestination would also do away with the impression we get that the characters have free will, undermining one of the *purposes* of a fictional open future.

Another way of retaining a fictional A-series whilst allowing for interpreters

to use information from Act II when watching Act III is to posit that Act II is not the future, but that Act III is in the fictional past, i.e. that Act II is not a flash-forward, and Act III is a flashback. This allows the fiction to have an open future, since we do not know what happens after Act II. Likewise, in *Max Payne* we can presume that what happens after the chronologically last scene is undetermined. This solution is easy to miss since Bourne and Caddick Bourne fail to specify what it would mean for Act II to be true in the fiction but not true at the time of Act III, and because they misleadingly speak of Act II as future events without disambiguating what 'future' means in this context; it is unclear whether they refer to the future relative to the screen present – the fictional events chronologically posterior to the moment currently displayed – or relative to the fictional present – the events following the metaphysically privileged fictional point in time. Moreover, Le Poidevin asserts that even if we assume that the fiction has an open future, there is nothing contradictory in assuming that events following a flashback are determinate, since said events are located in the fictional past (2016, p.324). It is not contradictory to endorse the OFF whilst claiming that the upcoming events are determined, because as Currie notes in his discussion on tense in cinema, a fictional event can be tensed from the perspective of a character even when it is not from the perspective of the viewer (1995a, p.218). In the same way that fictional events may be present for the characters at the time of occurrence yet not for the viewers, the future could be open for them but not us. However, then the OFF comes at the cost of the CoP, since we know that the events in Act II – which are in the fictional future relative to Act III – will inevitably take place, and it follows that the story *is* fixed, albeit for other reasons than the fixed nature of the future.

The same principle applies in games. We could concede that the future in game fiction is open, but in games where we are provided with information of upcoming story events must necessarily be set in the past, so the game story

would therefore not be interactive. In a game like *Max Payne*, we could claim that the first scene is in the present, but the rest of the game would not be interactive since the future relative to the following events is in the fictional past, making their future determinate. Moreover, this principle also applies to literature and cinema, so once more there is no reason to presume that truth in fiction would be different in game stories. Lastly, there still is no reason to presume that even the chronologically *last* scene in a narrative is in the fictional present; one could just as well presume that everything occurring after the story is in the fictional past. In *Sands of Time* this seems plausible: seeing how the story is set in ancient times one naturally presumes that the Prince's entire life is in the past, not only those parts which the player observes in the gameplay.

A related fallacy is committed by Le Poidevin when he speaks of the relation between the fictional present and the screen present. He says that the fictional future is open if what follows a fictional event is undetermined at the time said fictional event is present. He further adds that this can only be the case if the screen present is in the fictional present, because if the screen present is in the fictional past the events following it are determinate, which would refute that the fictional future is open (2016, pp.321-2). However, this conclusion does not follow; the determinate nature of the events portrayed does not necessarily reveal anything about the fictional temporality. If the screen future is *also* to be open it would indeed be necessary for the screen present and fictional present to coincide, but we can maintain that the fictional future is open even if the screen future is not, as long as we restrict our conclusion to the fictional future *per se*, not the events that follow what is in the screen present (which could be in a less distant fictional past, not necessarily future). What follows a given portrayed fictional event may well have been undetermined at the time of occurrence, allowing the fiction to have an open future (as argued above by Le Poidevin

himself, regarding how the determined nature of events following a flashback does not preclude an open future). This does not require the fictional present and screen present to coincide, and undermines the possibility to prove any specific relation between the respective presents in any given fiction; the screen present may represent the fictional past, meaning that the time-span following what is currently on-screen could have been undetermined when the events in the screen present were the fictional present.

If we thus presume that a given story takes place in the past it can consist exclusively of determinate facts whilst retaining an open future: one can be prescribed to imagine *both* that such-and-such will be the case in the future relative to the screen present *and* that at the time of occurrence within the fiction it was not already true that such-and-such would inevitably be the case. One consequence of this is that although game fictions may have open futures they are nevertheless not necessarily interactive (since the fictional present is not necessarily in the screen present), and they do not differ from fictions in other media. Moreover, if all segments in a story share the property of fictional pastness we arguably lose any potential advantages offered by the A-series, since there is nothing to distinguish them in terms of tense (save in their respective distances to the never displayed fictional present), so we may as well, if only for the sake of simplicity, think of them exclusively in terms of a B-series, since it is only their temporal locations relative to one another that conveys anything of importance. In brief, both Le Poidevin and Bourne and Caddick Bourne neglect that the fictional future can be open irrespective of when the fictional present is located in relation to the screen present. This, however, does not necessarily entail that story events are not fixed, meaning that game stories are not more interactive than stories in other media.

1.4.3 Open and closed futures in narratives without anachronies

So far the discussion has treated narratives with premonitions accessible to characters and/or the audience, but not fictions where neither characters nor audience possesses knowledge about the future. Le Poidevin says that the FFF need not apply to *all* fictions (2007, p.143). For instance, he mentions that in fictions without visions of the future – either fictional premonitions or flash-forwards – we cannot conclude that future-tensed propositions were always true prior to when those events eventually come to pass (Le Poidevin 2007, p.144). This point allows defenders of the CoP to argue that fictions can, as a principle, accommodate worlds with an open future, which in turn opens up for player interaction. There are nevertheless at least two fundamental problems that refute this possibility.

Firstly, neither Le Poidevin nor Bourne and Caddick Bourne provide a cogent explanation as to how we may ascertain the openness/fixity of the future in fictions without explicit allusions to facts about the future (including but not limited to flash-forwards and premonitions); without such references it effectively becomes impossible to distinguish between fictional worlds with fixed and open futures respectively. Bourne and Caddick Bourne suggest that some temporal properties are indefinite (2016, p.41),²⁴ but if this is true we cannot determine whether a given fiction without flash-forwards has an open or fixed future. Secondly, and more importantly, this problem applies to *all* media. If we grant that the absence of flash-forwards, premonitions etc. suffices in itself as evidence of indeterminacy regarding whether the future is open or close, it follows that the open/closed nature of the fictional future is indeterminate in both video games and novels/films, insofar as they lack evidence to the contrary, yet again raising the question of why

²⁴ Later on they claim that temporal properties are *not* indeterminate but merely underdetermined in the sense that we lack the information necessary to ascertain certain properties (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.64).

we should presume that video games are unique. Ultimately, whether a fiction has an open or closed fictional future is unrelated to the medium of the narrative, so the OFF does not make game fictions more interactive than stories in other media.

Chapter 2 – Temporal manipulation and relocation

This chapter continues the discussion from the previous chapter, and thus needs no repetition of theorists treated. While the first chapter introduced theories on temporality and addressed questions of simultaneity, the second chapter deals with various kinds of temporal manipulation of a narrative and how they problematize the assumption that the story conveyed takes place in the present. In the first section I consider how anachronies (such as flashbacks and flash-forwards) can be understood if temporal properties of a narrative do not allow for temporal relocation. In the second section I examine how separate and/or paused playthroughs influence story temporality. In the third and final section I discuss whether there is any need at all to assume that there is a present in video game stories.

2.1 Problems with flashbacks

2.1.1 Anachronies in games

As mentioned in the introduction, Juul claims that games mostly present their stories chronologically, but objections can be raised against this claim. Firstly, the scarcity of flashbacks in games does not seem to be exclusive to them: Grodal notes that radical changes in temporal order raises difficulties in comprehension, which is why *oral* narratives are predominantly canonical (2003, p.134).

Secondly, the claim that flashbacks are uncommon in games, if true, remains *descriptive*: it is indicative of common practice and sheds no light on ontological properties of the story. The reason why many games do not present interactive scenes in a non-chronological order probably stems from ludological practice rather than narratological properties, since many games include an incremental accumulation of resources, units, weapons, and/or upgrades. Thus,

the scarcity of flashbacks need not implicate that they *must* be rare, and even *if* they for some reason must be, Juul does not explain why this is a consequence of medium-inherent properties.

Thirdly, Juul invalidates his own conclusion through the admission that this is *mostly* the case, and that alternatives are therefore possible. Other theorists are aware of anachronies in games and do not seem to find this to be as problematic or uncommon as Juul makes it out to be (see for example Wei, Bizzocchi, and Calvert 2010, p.5; Zagal and Mateas 2010, p.851). There are examples of games including both kinds of anachronies declared to be impossible by Juul: *Max Payne* and its sequels commence in what purports to be present time with the events leading up to the first scene in the plot (which is the last scene in the story) presented in flashbacks; *Max Payne 3* (Rockstar Studios, 2012) includes a long interactive flashback in the middle of the game (since the entire game is a flashback this is a flashback *within* a flashback). *Sands of Time* is told as a flashback interspersed with occasional flash-forwards.

Moreover, both *Sands of Time* and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (Konami, 2004; henceforth *Snake Eater*) reference the type of paradox alluded to by Juul. In *Sands of Time*, if the player dies, the narrator objects and wishes to rectify his account (since the Prince is both the protagonist and the narrator it would be odd if he died in his own story). In *Snake Eater*, the player can kill the character Revolver Ocelot, who serves an integral part in the earlier games in the series (that chronologically take place after *Snake Eater*). However, should the player do so the game ends and the regular game over-screen is replaced with one saying 'time paradox'. Hence, both games acknowledge that their respective stories cannot progress after the death of a vital character, and they force the player to retry without creating a 'heterodox', paradoxical version of the story.

The common feature of both games is that failure to maintain temporal

congruity is treated in the same way as any failure *tout court*: with a 'game over'-screen, offering the player to try again. Juul does not explain why losing the game in this way differs significantly from any other kind of 'game over' and why this is caused by properties unique to games; all forms of 'game over' are cases of failure to complete established objectives presented by the game, and in all cases narrative closure is deferred.²⁵ Thus, the purported scarcity of anachronies in games reveals nothing about their conceivability, and there are numerous examples of how games can accommodate them. Even if there are some aspects unique to games in how they retain temporal integrity (e.g. not allowing players to kill certain characters to avoid paradoxes) this has no bearing on their capacity to include anachronies, even if they may treat anachronies differently. As Juul stated, it is not possible to alter the past, but he fails to realize that the 'game over' prevents the player from doing this; should she fail in a flashback, she is allowed new attempts until temporal congruity is secured. One could nevertheless object that the inclusion of flashbacks does not necessarily refute the CoP, but as will become clear throughout this section, the claims that games are in the present and that they contain flashbacks seem to be irreconcilable.

2.1.2 Flashbacks as memories

If games are in the present it follows that players cannot be 'transported' to another temporal plane (past/future) in their engagement with fiction, so flashbacks have to be explained in some other way. One solution mentioned by Currie, with respect to flashbacks in film, is that flashbacks are memories of a character, and that the mental activity takes place in the present (1995a, p.204). Bordwell agrees, saying that remembering and/or recounting the past is a common framing device in classical Hollywood film, and that this may be the reason why

²⁵ Wei, Bizzocchi, and Calvert present a similar objection (2010, p.6).

many narratologists have asserted its necessity (2004, p.215). For instance, when a character recounts a past event, the images of the flashback could represent her words (Metz 1991a, p.121; Branigan 1992, p.176-9). Such a solution could retain the CoP whilst obviating temporal repositioning of the spectator. One could maintain that games with flashbacks take place in the present for the same reason, either because they are memories or because the images correspond to what is uttered by a character. This solution has not been endorsed by the game theorists mentioned above; if they elaborate on temporal properties at all, they seem more inclined towards actual temporal repositioning. Nevertheless, one could possibly defend the CoP in games by claiming that flashbacks are memories in the present.

There are several games that provide framing devices similar to those Bordwell claims can be found in classical Hollywood film: most missions in *Hitman: Contracts* (IO Interactive, 2004) are presented as memories of the dying protagonist Agent 47. Some of the missions are altered versions of missions in earlier games, which could be explained as a result of Agent 47's critical state (this explanation would actually be preferable, as it explains the inconsistencies between the games). Likewise, in *Metal Gear Solid 4: Sons of the Patriots* (Kojima Productions, 2008) there is a flashback to a segment from the first game in the series, which is revealed to be the dream of the protagonist. As in the case of *Hitman: Contracts*, the inconsistencies between the dream and the first game are conveniently explained with reference to a character's unreliable memory. As for verbal narration being conveyed as images, the entire story of *Sands of Time* is presented as the Prince telling someone about his adventure, and he frequently interjects when the player dies, wishing to rectify his account; similarly, in *Max Payne* many events are commented upon by the eponymous hero/narrator. This is reconcilable with Metz's and Branigan's thoughts of images as corresponding to

the words of the narrator, because if the images in *Sands of Time* had not corresponded to the Prince's narration in any way at all, he would not have wanted to correct himself when the player fails.

However, Currie objects to this solution, as most flashbacks are not a character's purported act of remembering, and to assume that all flashbacks *must* be memories is question-begging (1995a, p.204). There are some complications following this solution that Currie does not address sufficiently; some of these are noted by Bordwell as he objects and explains that the character 'introducing' the flashback is not always a witness of events shown and could not have accessed all the information in it (2004, p.215). Bordwell's solution is that an act of remembering or verbal narration be best thought of only as the *initiation* of the flashback, but recounting/recalling only occurs at these 'boundary points' as he calls them, where voice-over and images are both present (2004, p.216).

Here one might raise some possible objections. It is reasonable to assume that not all flashbacks should be thought of as verbal accounts of what happened, not even when this is suggested by their introduction. One reason for not equating verbal narration and images in a flashback is that this introduces the problem of how to account for possible discrepancies between them, i.e. when the images reveal that the narrator is unreliable. If the images correspond to what the narrator says, but nevertheless differ from it, it follows that the narrator would present two concurrent, contradictory discourses, conveyed to the audience through voice-over and images respectively. The most obvious objection is that a person cannot be saying two things at exactly the same time, but apart from the practical impossibility of simultaneous 'double-narration' it would make little sense for the narrator to tell both versions, the incorrect as well as the correct one, as it would be irreconcilable either with her own interests (if she is hiding the truth on purpose) or her limited comprehension of the events (if she expresses her incorrect

interpretation of them). Further, the fictional interlocutors mostly seem to be unaware of this discrepancy seemingly accessible only to the spectator, meaning that the content of the images is not conveyed to them and can therefore not correspond to a verbal account.

Another problem of equating the images with the narration is the considerable number of details in the image that would presumably have to be conveyed orally – since all content of the images is presumably included in the verbal account – and we do not presume that the narrator is describing each minute detail to the fictional interlocutors of what the audience perceives visually. That would have to mean that the narrator is, for instance, describing the visual appearance of every single person in a crowd (even the ones she presumably cannot see herself) only because the *audience* sees what they look like.

This indicates that a character does not inform the interlocutors of all details in a flashback, even when it is introduced in conversation. However, this only counters Metz's and Branigan's claim that images somehow correspond to the narrator's verbal account of the events; they may still correspond to the narrator's *memories* of them, which would resolve the issue of verbal discourse differing in content from the images. The images would then correspond only to the narrator's memory, so she is both remembering and narrating in the present. As already mentioned, Bordwell objects, claiming that flashbacks do not correspond to memories, save at 'boundary points', but there are two possible reasons why his objections are invalid: the assumption that the narrator was a witness herself, and the assumption that images necessarily correspond to *the narrator's* mental activity (either remembering or imagining).

The first reason why Bordwell may be wrong is illustrated by *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014). Every episode of the series is presented as a flashback, of which most (if not all) contain several flashbacks of their own. Many scenes give

the impression that the narrator was not present and could therefore not have seen that which he is narrating to his contemporaneous interlocutors, which suggests – in accordance with Bordwell’s claim – that events in the flashback are not part of the narrator’s own memories or narration. However, this conception is contradicted by some passages where the narrator explicitly fills in details to the best of his knowledge, claiming that he does not know what *really* happened, sometimes going so far as to explicitly state that the characters he is talking about insist that events transpired in the way narrated, suggesting that he is merely retelling what they told him. With this in mind it seems likely that the narrator was mostly – but not always – informed at a later event of what happened in his absence. We could make the same assumption in both films and games: the narrator need not have been present in order to know what happened, but could have been told by others afterwards, and it is this which she then goes on to narrate. One could persist, and argue that just as the significant number of details in the image most likely does not correspond to a narrator’s otiose verbal description, mnemonic fidelity renders mere *reminiscence* (unaccompanied by verbal narration) equally unlikely and problematic for the same reason; the sheer number of details conveyed visually would make it unlikely that any normal character could remember even a single frame, let alone the entire scene.²⁶ However, Walton provides a counterargument against both the problem pertaining to the narrator’s acquisition of knowledge and her mnemonic fidelity: it is clearly fictional that the narrator knows everything in the flashback, and how she came to acquire that information is irrelevant (1990, pp.360-1); similarly, Currie argues that imagining one thing does not entail imagining its consequences (1995a, p.177). Thus, we could be prescribed to imagine that a narrator knows everything in a flashback without having to bother with the potential issues that follow. Hence, it is

²⁶ Branigan makes a similar observation (1992, p.274).

not a problem that the narrator could not, realistically, possess or convey the knowledge she does, so the narration could still be in the present.

The second objection is that if one rules out that the images correspond to the narrator's memories, they could still represent the mental activity of some other character, perhaps the imagination of the interlocutors.²⁷ However, this objection is not very cogent: Currie says that not all anachronies can be unequivocally associated with a character's memory or premonition (1995a, p.204), so this objection seems to presuppose the CoP rather than prove it. There are examples not mentioned by him which illustrate this well: in *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998) there are flash-forwards showing the fate of characters Lola encounters, but no character accesses this information (nor could they, since no one is made out to be prescient). In *Memento*, the first and second half of the story are divided into narrative segments interspersed with one another. Narrative segments of the second half are shown achronologically (we see the second half 'backwards': first the last scene, then the penultimate etc.), and these are interspersed with segments from the story's first half which are shown chronologically until the first and second half of the story finally 'meet up' at the end of the film; the ending of the narrative takes place in the middle of the story. However, the protagonist has a mental condition that prevents him from creating lasting long-term memories. Here one cannot possibly claim that the protagonist is thinking at a much later stage about the events portrayed and that the images represent his act of remembering, because his condition prevents him from storing memories for that long (the story is largely centred around his very *inability* to remember). Nor could one construct some kind of regress where he remembers one moment in which his past self remembers yet an even earlier moment, because that would entail temporal relocation, doing away with the presentness. More importantly, there is no property

²⁷ Branigan considers this possibility too (1992, p.179).

inherent in and unique to the medium of video games that prevents developers from making a game-adaptation of *Memento*; the game *Spoiler Alert* (MEGAFUZZ, 2014) is similar to it structurally, since one plays the last level first, then the penultimate etc. Also, just as in films, there are games where flashbacks cannot be attributed to a reminiscing narrator: both *Goldeneye 007* (Rare, 1997) and *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North, 2013) begin with a text telling the player that the events took place nine years ago, and *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* (Naughty Dog, 2009) starts *in medias res* and then shows what happened earlier, but in none of these games are the sequences from the past presented as someone's memories.

Moreover, there may be certain kinds of narratives where it would be unconvincing or outright impossible to invoke memories of the narrator. For instance, Le Poidevin notes that so-called 'mindless fiction' – where the events are not observed by anyone – could not include flashbacks if they must correspond to someone's memory, but there is no reason to think that they could *not* (2016, p.325). Moreover, this seems to be unrelated to medium-specific properties. Mindless fictions seem rare in games, but there are some examples: in *Flower* (Thatgamecompany, 2009) the player controls the wind, and we could most certainly imagine a game like *Flower* that does not tell its story chronologically. Yet again, current practice in the game industry does not necessarily reveal inherent medium specific properties.

Another possible argument by defenders of the CoP mentioned by Currie is that an anachrony could be attributed to some extradiegetic narrator (1995a, p.204). The idea would be that all narratives have some kind of narrator, if only implied, and that it is this narrator whose memories are shown. This argument could be even more appealing to game theorists defending the CoP, especially to those considering the player to be the narrator of the story (e.g. Thabet 2015). If

the narrator is the deictic centre, and the player is the narrator, it follows that the player is the deictic centre, meaning that the game story shares her temporality. However, Currie's counterargument concerning films is that it would be controversial to claim that all films (with or without anachronies) have a narrator, and this is indeed a contentious issue.²⁸ To posit that all films and games *must* have a narrator, even when none is seen or heard of, seems more like an *ad hoc* move to save the CoP.

In fact, this point has an even bigger impact in relation to games, where interactivity is at stake, which becomes clear in the light of another objection presented by Currie: he explains that if a story is to take place now, some of the narration would have to be contemporaneous with the events it describes, but the common conception is that a narrator – if there is one – speaks of *past* events (1995a, p.205). Seymour Chatman agrees with this conception of the narrator's relation to the events (1978, p.63, p.83). With this in mind, we can thus distinguish two necessary premises for it to be true that flashbacks in films are present memories of a narrator: 1) all films have a narrator (who may be implied) and 2) the events in the flashbacks are in the present. It follows from Currie's and Chatman's assertions that these two premises are irreconcilable with one another, as the narrator speaks of *past* events; either the flashback is in the present or it is the memory of a narrator, it cannot be both.

The same premises can be adopted in games, and they are problematic there for the same reasons. In *Sands of Time* and *Max Payne* it is made clear that the narration is not simultaneous with events narrated. Advocates of the CoP could regard this as confirmation of the thesis that the present of the game corresponds to that of the player, but it could at most prove that the *narration* is present (if even

²⁸ See, for instance, Seymour Chatman (1978, 1990), Bordwell (1985), Wayne Booth (2002), Kania (2005), and Katherine Thomson-Jones (2007).

that), not *that which is narrated*. Both Max Payne and the Prince categorically use the past tense when referring to events that seem, to the player, to appear in the present, and it is the narrated events that would have to be in the present in order for the stories to be interactive, but they are clearly set in the past.²⁹

There are more fundamental problems related to flashbacks and the claim that all scenes in a game or film must necessarily be in the present. Abbot explains that narrative time can depart from story time in three major ways: rearranging the order of story events in the narration; expanding/shortening narrative time devoted to a given story event; displaying the same story event more than once (2008, p.242). If the CoP obtains in games, it makes Abbott's three temporal manipulations inaccessible to them; relocating a scene in the B-series would consequently relocate it in the A-series. Rearranging the scenes of a film does not change the order of its story events,³⁰ and game theorists like Juul fail to explain why it should be different in games.

The reason why it follows that relocation in the B-series would entail a corresponding relocation in the A-series is simple: Abbott explains that whereas the temporal direction and structure of a narrative is malleable, the story within it is always chronological (2008, p.17). This means that if we have a story sequence with three events with a clear temporal connection to each other, 1-2-3, and these are represented by a narrative sequence with three corresponding scenes, x-y-z (x corresponds to 1, y to 2 and z to 3), then regardless of how we structure the narrative sequence in a film or a novel (y-z-x; z-x-y; x-z-y etc.) readers and spectators alike are still expected by the text to conclude that the story events take

²⁹ Hanson acknowledges that the events narrated are in the past but asserts that 'the player is acting in the present, controlling the past actions of [the Prince].'(2018, p.152)

Jordan Mechner, the creator of *Sands of Time*, notes that narration in the past tense should contradict the impression that one is able to influence the course of events (2007, p.116).

³⁰ Aarseth agrees ([1994]2003, p.765).

place in the order 1-2-3. If one on the other hand imputes a direct structural correlation to plot and story so that the chronological order of story events always corresponds to the order of the narrative sequences that present them – which one is obliged to do if one claims that the story is in the present – it follows that a structural rearrangement of narrative events entails a temporal rearrangement of story events. Thus, if scene x would be moved in the plot so that it is represented after y and z (giving y-z-x) it would follow that x's corresponding story event 1, because of this rearrangement, now takes place after story event 2 and 3 (conveyed by y and z) instead of only being *represented* after them, so narrative sequence y-z-x conveys that the story events take place in the order 2-3-1, because if 1 would still take place before 2 and 3 in spite of being represented after them, it would follow that the fictional present of 1 does not coincide with the screen present. If this were the case, flashbacks would be inconceivable in game narratives, as the operation necessary to produce flashbacks in other media would, in games, bring about alterations in the events' temporal relations to *one another* in order to preserve that between *the story and the player*, that is, of concomitance. Game theorists mentioned in the introduction are unaware of these consequences, but will have to concede that they follow from the premise that games are always in the present.

The sheer absurdity of these consequences becomes obvious when studying any game with flashbacks, as Abbott's first and second temporal rearrangement would not be possible in games (neither rearrangement of scenes nor revisiting them). In the beginning of *Max Payne*, the eponymous hero is standing on a skyscraper, beholding the helicopter he has just shot down, reminiscing about his wife and child who died three years earlier. The following sequence is an interactive flashback in which Max comes home and discovers his recently killed wife and daughter, and the rest of the game is about what led to the

beginning of the game. If rearrangement in the representation entails a temporal rearrangement of story events as outlined above, it would follow that the story events in *Max Payne* necessarily follow one another chronologically. The story would then begin with Max on top of a skyscraper looking at the helicopter wreckage, brooding over his dead wife and kid, whereafter he enters his apartment and finds his family inexplicably resurrected (only to be killed again), finally leading up to what is presumably a different but identical scene where Max is, once more, standing on top of a skyscraper, looking at (another) burning helicopter he just shot down.³¹

It would also follow, paradoxically, that the temporal relations between narrative sequences would change when presented in a different medium: a chain of events would have to be seen as present at the time of playing the game only because of purportedly medium specific properties (meaning that they transpire chronologically, as outlined above), but since Juul and others claim that non-interactive media *can* indicate other temporal properties, and the narrative of *Max Payne* clearly indicates that the narrative is a flashback, the order would be rearranged as a consequence of moving the events from an interactive medium to a non-interactive one. The exact same narrative sequence would then express different temporal relationships between its segments in virtue of being expressed in different media, meaning that a playthrough of a game and a recording of it convey different relations between the very same segments. This means that when playing *Max Payne*, the discovery of the dead wife is in the present (since flashbacks cannot exist if the CoP obtains in games), so, as already noted, the scene would show how Max discovers his resurrected wife who has been killed for

³¹ Wei, Bizzochi, and Calvert also reach the conclusion that the player's interaction influences temporal relations (2010, pp.7-8, p.13), but neglect the problematic consequences I outline. Ryan reasons similarly to the way I do but for some reason only draws this conclusion with regard to hypertext (2015, p.198).

a second time. In contrast, in a recording of this playthrough, the death of Max's family and the events following it would instead be a flashback, since a film can convey anachronies in a way games allegedly cannot. This would also contradict what Mukherjee asserted earlier, that the game story can be stored in recordings, because once recorded, it would become a different story. Game scholars would then be obliged to argue that the same text can accommodate different works, a theory none of the aforementioned theorists seems to embrace, or even consider.

Thus, flashbacks pose a significant challenge to the CoP, as they imply that the story takes place in the past. Conceptions of flashbacks that allow for them to take place in the present – e.g. claiming that the images correspond to verbal narration or memories – lack support in many narratives, as there is not always a narrator to whom we could ascribe the narration. Positing that all narratives have a narrator not only is *ad hoc*, it also entails that the events narrated are necessarily set in the past, which precludes interaction with them. Moreover, the assumption that flashbacks are absent in games entails that all scenes are presented chronologically, which would lead to counterintuitive interpretations of narratives that clearly present their stories in a non-chronological order.

2.2 Separate screenings, pauses, and temporality

2.2.1 Separate screenings and playthroughs

Another problem mentioned by Bourne and Caddick Bourne – related to the assessment of temporal properties of a fiction in relation to those of a person's reception of it – is the question of what happens when the same film is screened at different but overlapping times, so that one person is watching the first scene when someone else is watching the second. It follows that it would result in a contradiction if both viewers are to imagine that the respective scenes onscreen are present in virtue of being watched in the present (Bourne and Caddick Bourne

2016, pp.34-5). A similar point has been raised by Le Poidevin (2016, p.325). As the CoP leads to the same result for both people, Bourne and Caddick Bourne conclude that it is not a reliable mechanism for locating the fictional present (2016, p.36).

There is an implied premise here, of which neither Caddick and Caddick Bourne nor Le Poidevin seem to be aware, namely that each audiovisual fiction is only seen/played once in one continuous screening/playthrough. By rejecting this premise it also follows that temporal discrepancies arise whenever a given screening/playthrough is experienced as fragmented because of pauses, or when the same narrative is experienced twice by the same person. One can assume that readers are not expected to re-read a previous passage before finishing the book, and that spectators are not expected to rewind a film mid-screening to watch the same scene again, but it is nevertheless possible to do so and, one may presume, not uncommon. Moreover, repeated access to the same narrative segment is generally regarded as the rule rather than the exception in video games, as it seems to be generally acknowledged that repetition is ubiquitous, for instance when players lose and retry the same section over and over until they master it (Aarseth 1997, p.113; Wolf 2001c, p.81; King 2002, p.52; King and Krzywinska 2002, pp.18-19; Frasca 2003b, p.227; Ryan 2004, p.351; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Heide Smith, and Pajares Tosca 2008, p.204; Wei, Bizzocchi, and Calvert 2010, p.7; Warkentin 2014; Wesp 2014; Mukherjee 2015, p.124; Tavinor 2017, p.27; Hanson 2018, p.111). In fact, repetition is so essential to the game experience that some of these theorists claim that this feature makes them fundamentally different from novels and literature.³²

Bourne and Caddick Bourne contend that it would be wrong to presuppose

³² I do not deny that repetition may be more essential in games, my point is only that it is nevertheless *possible* in other media.

a temporal relation between our world and the fictional one, and that one for that reason cannot ask what happens in the fiction while time passes in the actual world (2016, p.36). Le Poidevin adds that by assuming a *temporal* connection between the fictional world and ours one has to explain why there is not also a *causal* one (1988, p.254), and he further says that it could be argued that we cannot speak of the temporal properties of a world within which we are not located ourselves (2001, p.71). His point can possibly be countered by game theorists like Juul and Thabet who do posit a causal connection between the game world and ours, which would allow for a temporal relation as well. What is problematic is how to explain this connection without resorting to circular reasoning of the kind that games are interactive because they are in the present, and that they are in the present because they are interactive (leading to the four questions mentioned in the introduction of the first chapter). Furthermore, both temporal issues related to films, mentioned above, cause the same problems when applied to games: if two players play the same game but start at different times, it follows that the same event is past and present simultaneously. Further, if a player pauses the game momentarily, it behoves the game theorists to explain how the timelines can remain aligned when the player continues the game.

Le Poidevin elaborates on the problem of simultaneous screening, and says that if a fiction is partly constituted by the performance of it, one would be forced to equate each screening with its own unique fiction (2016, p.325). He does not condone this solution, arguing that we usually think of fictional truth as independent of screenings of a given narrative (Le Poidevin 2016, p.325). Bourne and Caddick Bourne defend a solution similar to the one presented by Le Poidevin, when the fiction itself presents temporal incongruities: in *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993) the main character seems to be stuck in a time-loop, waking up on the same day repeatedly, but Bourne and Caddick Bourne argue that we are

actually shown several possible worlds with identical people waking up in identical circumstances, not the same world with the same person experiencing the same day (2016, p.96).³³ Perhaps we could introduce a similar concept for separate screenings, so that they are actually about different but identical people in separate possible worlds.

However, there are good reasons to concur with Le Poidevin that one should not increase the number of fictions to resolve temporal discrepancies, some of which he does not mention. By pairing each screening/playthrough with its own fiction we resolve the problem of simultaneous and/or multiple consecutive screenings/playthroughs of the same film/game, because, by definition, the same fiction can only be accessed once; one can never step into the same narratological river twice. However, not only does this interpretation lack support in most fictions – *Groundhog Day* does not prescribe imagining distinct possible worlds – this would then have to obtain for films and games alike, so the difference between them would be undermined, and game theorists would either have to explain why we cannot interact with films if they too take place in the present, or concede that games are not interactive in virtue of being set in the present. To claim that games are unique in this respect is *ad hoc*.

Furthermore, it would mean that there is a potentially infinite number of identical fictions, each of which is presented for each screening of a given film, or almost identical fictions created each time a given game is played. The debate regarding whether identical texts (or almost identical ones) convey different stories is outside the scope of this thesis, but for present purposes it suffices to say that it is counterintuitive to demand that an infinite number of (almost) identical texts be paired with an infinite number of stories, all for the sake of salvaging the CoP.³⁴

³³ Ryan also considers the possibility of regarding a singular fiction as a collection of possible worlds (2015, p.199).

³⁴ For more on textual individuation, see e.g. Tilghman (1982, pp.297-9), Currie

However, several game theorists are quite open to the conception of the player as some kind of creator (e.g. Davidson 2008; Ip 2011; Warkentin 2011; Laurel 2014; Ulas 2014; Wendler 2014; Haggis 2016; Zarzycki 2016; Whaley 2018). This could imply that each playthrough is its own fiction, and for that reason one could equate the actual present with the present of its respective game story, but that would be a desperate measure on their part, and would eliminate all possibilities of speaking of a game as having a singular story (which most scholars and critics alike tend to do). Hence, they would have to do away with one of two premises: 1) the same story can be analysed by different people playing the same game, or 2) the story can be created/altered by the player since it takes place now. Regardless of which premise they reject, they would have to explain why the remaining one applies exclusively to games and not film and/or literature.

2.2.2 Pauses

However, there are other problems that are not likely to be resolved by linking each playthrough/screening to its own story, even if one disregards the counterintuitive nature of this solution. It has the appeal of obviating issues arising when two players play different segments of the same game: by linking each playthrough to its respective fiction the problem is merely ostensible, for they are not really playing the same story. Nevertheless, even if the narratives are different, problems concerning temporal relations within their respective stories remain, and one has to answer what happens to the temporal alignment of a film/game if watched/played at separate occasions due to pauses.

Juul sees nothing problematic in how games may be paused, either by the player or by the game when it is loading the next area, and he claims that this

(1990, pp.77-8, pp.152-3, p.178), Lamarque (1990, p.337, 2009, pp.75-6), Livingston (2005, pp.112-34),and Tavinor (2012, p.192).

break only applies to play time but not fictional time (2004, p.136, 2005, pp.148-151). Likewise, Zagal and Mateas (2010, p.856), Charley Reed (2016, p.632), and Hanson (2018, p.59) contend that players can control time through pausing it. It has also been argued that they can reset time by loading a save game (Hanson 2018, p.106), or simply by resetting the game itself (Reed 2016, p.632). Similarly, Ryan explains that, in an RPG, whenever the player is considering possible responses in dialogues with other characters, narrative time stops until the player makes her choice (2015, p.237). None of these theorists seem to be aware that such an explanation is untenable, as it would preclude the CoP.

The CoP presumes that a film is only seen once, in one sitting without any breaks, because if it is not, one would have to explain what happens to the fictional present when the same film is watched a second time, or when it is paused and the screening is continued at another occasion. Games are usually *not* played once in one uninterrupted sitting, nor do they seem to encourage players to play them this way, so adherents of the CoP would have to explain why these temporal connections are incessantly dispersed and reestablished.

Here it may be objected that games should ideally be played in one sitting even if common practice does not reflect this, just as films are not supposed to be interrupted by commercials and/or toilet breaks. After all, not all games do have a pause function, such as *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware, 2011). However, this objection does not seem warranted. Firstly, as already stated, game theorists agree that repetition is ubiquitous and essential in games. Secondly, it is atypical to play a game taking many hours to finish in but one sitting (Newman 2004, p.84; Kania 2018, p.198n23). A game theorist may object that it takes considerably less time in a so-called 'speed-run', a playthrough where the game is played with the intention of finishing it as fast as possible, but game narratives usually do not seem to prescribe players to finish them as quickly as possible, nor is it possible to do so

on the first attempt. Speed-runs require much practice in order to memorize and master the optimal strategy in the various levels and missions, and although games prescribe the player to learn the best strategy through playing, they do not expect players to already know it on a first playthrough.

Furthermore, not all games can be played without pausing: in *Ocarina of Time* and *Resident Evil 4* one *must* pause to reach the inventory screen where one can equip weapons and items necessary for completion of the game. Not even films always seem to be intended to be seen in one sitting, as longer ones like *Ben-Hur* (Wyer, 1959) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) include intermissions in the middle. For films to be A-series aligned, the intermissions would have to start and end at exactly the right moment, with nothing happening in the story inbetween. In games, it would mean that the spectator/player happens to start, pause and unpaue the game at the exact same moment for the timelines to be aligned. This becomes even more problematic in both films and games when a sequel commences at the same moment where the first film/game ends. The films/games would have to be synchronized so that the player/spectator can go from one to the other without any break, stopping the first film/game at the moment the credits appear, which is impossible for those playing/watching the first part when it first comes out, who have to wait for the sequel to be released. This is made even more problematic by prequels, since they are seen after the first film but take place before it, and thus could not possibly be A-series aligned. In brief, the argument that each film and game should be experienced without breaks does not hold, so they are not likely to be A-series aligned.

This relates to the more fundamental question already mentioned, of what happens to a given fiction when it is not watched, which is addressed by Bourne and Caddick Bourne, and Le Poidevin. Bourne and Caddick Bourne contend that it is unwarranted to ask whether the fictional present progresses irrespective of our

engagement with it (2016, p.36), but this conclusion stems primarily from their conception of fictional time as unrelated to ours. Unlike Bourne and Caddick Bourne, Le Poidevin does not immediately reject the question of whether the fictional present keeps moving outside of screenings (2016, pp.325-6), and by so doing he unwittingly points to the more fundamental problem of how the real and the fictitious present could be aligned to begin with, and why they continue to be so. If game theorists like Juul and Thabet accept that the fictional and actual presents are not aligned when we are not engaging with a narrative, they must explain why they are aligned when we do engage with it, what it is in a given fiction that prescribes imagining this. If there is no direct link between actual and fictional time, it could at most be an inexplicable coincidence that games take place at the same time as they are played, and causal connections should disperse along with the temporal ones, ergo: game stories would cease to be interactive.

One possible explanation as to why video game stories take place in the present, which is reconcilable with pauses, is that just as the player affects the story of the game, she also affects its very temporality, in the sense that her playing generates fictional truths in the story but also that her playing extends the fictional timeline. Time would thus not pass when the game is not played, because it is playing *per se* that adds time and allows it to progress. Thus, if fictional truth is equivalent to prescribed imagination, and we are not prescribed to imagine *anything* outside our engagement, it follows that we are not prescribed to imagine that time passes outside engagement. This allows for the fictional present to progress when we engage with a fiction without entailing problems of what happens outside our engagement; it further seems to be in line with Bourne and Caddick Bourne's claim that it is unwarranted to ask whether the fictional present progresses outside our engagement with it.

Does this resolve the issue of pausing? Not necessarily. First of all,

narratives in all media could potentially prescribe imagining that the story takes place in the present, meaning that video games are not unique. Secondly, a fiction can prescribe imagining that the story progresses even when it is not screened: the first season of the TV-series *24* (2002) indicates that story time passes during the commercial breaks.

More importantly, this solution is countered indirectly by Le Poidevin when he considers potential temporal connections in film, and asserts that if it is the engagement that generates fictional truths about which moment that is present, it follows that fictional facts disperse when there is no screening (2016, p.325). Some game theorists endorse this solution, and accept that there is no fiction in a game when it is not played, but maintain that this only applies to games and not films: Ken Perlin does not think game-characters exist when he leaves his computer (2004, p.15), and as mentioned earlier, Mukherjee argues that the narrative of the game disappears after the playing but may be preserved in recordings. By contrast, Jon Robson and Aaron Meskin claim that fictional truths in games still obtain even when they are not played, and that if the gameplay is recorded, the truths of that recording obtain even when it is not watched (2016, p.172). If fictional truths are dependent on screenings, then theorists like Perlin and Mukherjee would have to concede that we can only speak of fictional truths when we are playing, as it is only then that we are prescribed to imagine them (and even then we could only speak of the fictional truths obtaining at a particular moment in the fiction, since we are never prescribed to imagine the fiction in its entirety). Moreover, this principle would not be unique to games: either both games and films generate fictional truths at the time of screening or neither does. Either way, game narratives would not differ from films (and possibly novels that use the present tense), so their stories cannot be interactive if those in films (and some novels) are not.

One could potentially solve the problem of what happens when pauses 'break up' a narrative by extrapolating the principle mentioned earlier, of equating each screening with its own fiction. Thus, each time a segment of a film is watched we access a different fiction, meaning that by watching the first and second half of the same film on different occasions, one is actually watching two separate fictions. Likewise, by pausing the game, one stops the representation of one fiction, and by unpausing, one starts that of another.

However, even if we disregard the issues following from this solution, already mentioned in the discussion on separate screenings, this would aggravate other questions of truth in fiction. It would follow that if one watches/plays a film/game one minute at a time, a 100 minutes long narrative becomes 100 minute-long narratives, which would arguably make the 100 corresponding stories incomprehensible. When watching/playing segment 100, one could never say with certainty what happened in the time leading up to it (i.e. the events one would intuitively connect to minute 1 through 99), because most textual evidence other spectators/players would use is inaccessible to the 'fragmenting' spectator/player. She cannot claim that each segment belongs to a unique fiction which happens to be identical to that of a corresponding fiction received in one coherent screening/playthrough – i.e. that her segment number 43 corresponds to what happens in the same film/game after 43 minutes when said film/game is watched/played in one sitting³⁵ – because she has no textual evidence to support it, only a disjointed series of 100 minute-long minimalist narratives. Someone who watches the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1980) (or plays a video game adaptation of it) cannot say, when watching/playing the very last minute-long segment, that Vader (David Prowse) is the father of Luke (Mark Hamill), because

³⁵ Provided that there is an 'ideal playthrough' with a fixed duration. Precluding this assumption would only exacerbate issues of fragmented fiction even further.

that is revealed in another segment, which constitutes a separate fiction. Furthermore, when watching/playing the segment where their kinship is revealed the spectator/player should not be surprised to find out this. Since the preceding segments belong to other fictions, it is not true in this segment that this had been a secret to real and fictional characters alike up until the moment of revelation; the impact of all plot-twists would disappear.

Furthermore, this presupposes that Luke's accusation of Vader killing his father and Vader's revelation appear in the same minute-long fiction; if it is divided into two separate minute-long fictions it would not be true in either that Luke and Vader are related. In one collection of screenings/playthroughs it may be that almost no piece of information obtains, should the narrative be segmented at the 'right' instances in such a way that no two utterances related to one another appear in the same segment. In a video game the number of separate fictions would often be many more than in a film for two reasons: firstly, games are often longer than films; secondly, as noted above, several theorists think retries are an integral part of video games, but if each retry marks the beginning of a new fiction, it means that in difficult games the player could end up with much more than one fiction per minute. With all this in mind, one can rule out that each screening/playthrough is linked to its own unique fiction, and the problem of retaining the relation between actual and fictional present remains.

2.2.3 Resetting time

There is another possible solution which does not require thinking of the same narrative as conveying infinitely many identical stories: Yaffe suggests that the fictional present in films can be 'reset' (2003, p.134). Similar thoughts can be found in discussions on games: Ryan contends that whenever one hears the same narrative more than once, one is 'temporally relocated' to its beginning (2015,

pp.105-6); Juul calls save-games manipulations of game time that allow players to continue from a stored game state at a moment in play time (2004, p.137); as already mentioned, both Hanson (2018, pp.90-1, p.106) and Reed (2016, p.632) maintain that the player's control of game time comprises the ability to reset it (neither Juul nor Hanson explain why this does not apply to films). Similarly, Le Poidevin suggests that the time of a film could be reset for every screening of it, but contrary to the aforementioned scholars he does not seem to take this solution seriously (2016, p.326).

Yaffe speaks primarily of temporal resetting within a single fiction in relation to anachronies, but this principle can be applied to paused and separate screenings as well, because both are connected to the more fundamental problem of explaining how the actual and fictional A-series can be aligned. Yaffe argues that if films are A-series aligned it means that fictional events recede into the past at the same rate as the images conveying them. When a flashback appears, he says, the images before the flashback – which purportedly show the present – will recede at a slower rate than if the events had been shown chronologically; the pre-flashback scene can be followed directly by the post-flashback-scene in fictional time, but in viewing time they could be several minutes, or even hours apart, since the flashback is inserted between them. Yaffe's solution is that the flashback 'resets' the spectator's conception of the location in order to re-align the past images (2003, p.134).

Yaffe is right in his observation regarding the possible temporal discrepancy, because if we have a flashback that lasts for half an hour, we may get the awkward consequence that the pre-flashback events seemingly took place only an instant ago, but must have taken place thirty minutes ago in *story time* since they are half an hour away in *screen-time*. If the A-series properties of the story supervene on those of the screening, it follows that the pre-flashback story event

must have taken place thirty minutes ago even if the narrative indicates that the post-flashback event followed immediately afterwards. If fictional time progresses at the same rate during the flashback it must mean that nothing happens in the story for as long as the flashback is onscreen, which seems unlikely in films where the action continues immediately where it left off before the flashback, or returns to a moment much later in story time than the length of the flashback would allow for (i.e. the post-flashback scene takes place two hours after the pre-flashback scene, even though the flashback only lasts a couple of minutes). There simply is no guarantee that temporal progression during flashbacks always corresponds to the duration of said flashback. By saying that the fictional present can be 'reset' the temporal discrepancy is obviated, and the fictional and the actual present remain aligned. What Yaffe does not seem to realize is that this possibly solves the problem of all anachronies – he only mentions flashbacks but does not see that it is equally applicable to flash-forwards and ellipses – as well as the issues focused on in this section, of fragmented and separate screenings/playthroughs. Whenever a player pauses the game, or when the game stops to load the next level, or even when its framerate slows down because of limits in the hardware, one could say that the present 'resets', so that fiction and reality become A-series aligned once more. It could even solve the problem of the Duration Assumption if we hold that the present 'resets' at every frame throughout the narrative.

However, this is not a viable solution; it is egregiously *ad hoc* and arbitrary, yet another move primarily motivated to save the CoP. Moreover, it does not prove that the story takes place in the present, for one may just as well claim that we access the past of the story, and that it is the pastness that is 'reset' at anachronies, pauses, and separate screenings. Instead of claiming that fiction and reality are A-series aligned, and that this relation is maintained through 'resetting' for which there seems to be no imaginative prescription by the narrative, it would

be better to concede that there is no A-series alignment at all, i.e. that the video game story does not take place in the present and cannot be interactive for that reason.

Hence, separate screenings of the same narrative show that one cannot assume that a story takes place in the present, unless one adopts the counterintuitive conception that each screening/playthrough corresponds to its own unique fiction (that happens to be identical to those of other screenings/playthroughs of the same narrative). This solution is made even less plausible by the fact that a single screening/playthrough may be paused, which would require each *segment* to be its own fiction, which would complicate interpretative matters even further. One could attempt to resolve this by positing that the temporality can be 'reset' so as to retain the alignment between the real and fictional timelines, but this solution is *ad hoc*.

2.3 The existence of the fictional present

The question examined in this section is whether any moment in the fiction can be identified as present at all, in the sense that there is some kind of metaphysically privileged point in fictional time. As Bourne and Caddick Bourne explain, the flow of time – 'the change in the temporal location of events from being future, to present, to past' – is, according to theories on the A-series, 'not to be understood merely in terms of the temporal perspective we have towards those events. In this sense, the flow of time is an objective feature of reality' (both quotes from 2016, p.27). If games are to take place in the present, it would mean that it is this metaphysically privileged point in time that moves, and if games are to differ from narratives in other media, one would have to claim that this is *not* a feature of film and literature. One could claim that there is no flow in films, but that only our perspective changes, and what sets games apart – what makes it possible for

them to be interactive but not films – is that fictional time *actually flows*. Conversely, if there is no metaphysically privileged, moving point in fictional time, games cannot be interactive. Briefly, can time in any kind of fiction be an A-series, or is it with necessity only a B-series? Does this differ between media?

The first question to be answered is why any point in the story should be labelled as present. The first reason for this may be that there presumably is a present in the *actual* world, and it seems intuitive that things should be similar in the fictional one.³⁶ Such a solution has been presented by Le Poidevin, drawing inspiration from Lewis. According to David Lewis' view on how to ascertain what is true in fiction:

A sentence of the form 'In the fiction f, ϕ ' is non-vacuously true iff some world where f is told as known fact and ϕ is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and ϕ is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where f is told as known fact. (Lewis 1978, p.42)

Le Poidevin simplifies this as follows: 'It is true in fiction F that p if and only if, within the class of possible worlds where F is told as known fact, there is at least one world where p is true and which is closer to the actual world than any world in that same class where p is not true' (Le Poidevin 2007, p.150). This principle, which Walton calls 'the reality principle' (1990, p.144), has been discussed by several theorists to varying extents, even if they do not always call it by this name (e.g. Eco 1979; Byrne 1993; Livingston 1993; Hanley 2004; Kania 2007; Gendler 2010; Le Poidevin 2016; Friend 2017; Stock 2017). However, one recurrent flaw among some (but not all) of these theorists is that they treat the Reality Principle

³⁶ Provided that the actual time series is an A-series; for objections, see McTaggart (1927, section 33).

as separate from other principles that define truth in fiction, something to be combined with, for instance, the intentions of the author, or the most plausible meaning of a text in relation to linguistic conventions. Stock goes so far as to say that the Reality Principle is *incompatible* with her own preferred interpretative method of equating fictional truth with the intentions of the actual author (2017, p.52). However, The Reality Principle is not incompatible with any interpretative model, it is *contingent* on them. An intentionalist like Stock could claim that truth in fiction is defined by the actual author's intentions and that the Reality Principle obtains if and only if this is what the real author intends. Otherwise Stock would face some serious issues of how to explain why we always seem prescribed to draw on knowledge of the real world: 'Anyone who supposes that fictions are radically cut off from the world will need to confront the obvious fact that [...] fictional "worlds" incorporate a great deal of straightforward information about the real world' (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p.95). Therefore, we cannot say that the fictional time-line is an A-series only with reference to real life, because we cannot apply the Reality Principle without 'permission' from the fiction in question. Seeing how many games, films, and books include timelines quite different in nature from our own, there is little reason to assume that the fictional time must correspond to the actual one in that it too is an A-series, in spite of all other possible differences; in a game like *Sands of Time* where time can be slowed down and/or reversed, it makes little sense to presume that time must be an A-series only because that would bring it closer to the actual world, seeing how it is already radically different in other respects.

Related to this, some of what Le Poidevin says about the fixity/openness of the fictional future can be applied in relation to presentness as well. Le Poidevin claims that 'if it is a necessary non-fictional truth that the future is unfixed, then in no worlds will the future be fixed' (2007, p.150). Likewise, we may conclude that if

it is a necessary property of actual time that there is a present, it follows that there must be a present in the time of game stories; conversely, if it is not an inherent property, video game stories need not necessarily have a fictional present.

One reason as to why there is no fictional present, cited by both McTaggart (1927, p.16) and Currie (1995a, p.207) is that it is impossible for the recipient of a narrative to ascertain which moment in the story that is the present. According to Bourne and Caddick Bourne:

A satisfactory theory of time's flow requires there to be something significantly different about the present moment which serves to characterize the difference between past, present, and future and thus what it would be for there to be a genuine change from one to the other. Without such a significant difference between the present time and other times, it is hard to see what it would be for time to flow, because it is hard to see what sort of change the flow of time would involve. (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.27)

If we cannot tell whether a given scene is an anachrony or in the fictional present, then there is perhaps no significant difference that sets the fictional present apart. In films, it seems problematic to locate any such metaphysically privileged point in the story; as noted by Cardwell, we cannot tell whether a shot is a flashback unless it is seen in context (2003, pp.86-7). In games one could argue that interactivity is the property that makes the metaphysically privileged point in time different. The fictional present would thus be the moment one can interact with, similar to what Juul says when he defines the game's present as the moment with which one interacts (2005, p.143). In *Max Payne*, this would mean that the first scene is a flash-forward since it is not interactive, and that the second scene is in the present because it *is*. However, this hypothesis is problematic because of four factors: the possible circularity of the argument, the possibility to save and reload

video games, games containing anachronies and time travel, and the multimedial nature of games.

Firstly, the claim that the moment with which one interacts must be a fictional present seems more like an assumption than a necessary consequence of the dynamics of fictional temporality. It is an argument *presuming* the existence of a fictional present as well as its location in the screen present, possibly leading to circularity: the interactive segment is the fictional present because it is interactive, and it is interactive because it is the fictional present. Moreover, the mere fact that one moment in the narrative differs from others does not set games apart from other media. One could just as well claim that the present moment in a film is the moment currently represented onscreen, or that the present moment in a book is the one the reader is currently reading about. In both of these cases, it is the property of being represented that sets the moment apart, and the flow of time changes which moment that is represented and therefore which moment that is present. Having a moment labelled as present, however, does not make films or books interactive, so this cannot be sufficient to make video game stories interactive either.

Secondly, it is problematic to posit any one moment as present with regard to its interactivity, because reloading a saved game allows the player to bring back a past moment to interact with it, as mentioned by both Mukherjee (2015, p.137) and Juul (2004, p.137). Interactivity is a property unique to games and presumably gives us a reason to classify a given moment as present in a way one cannot do in films and books, since they lack interactivity. Nevertheless, it is the very same property that precludes this classification and deprives that one moment of its exclusiveness; we can bring back any moment and make it interactive once more, meaning that interactivity does not suffice to indicate temporal properties of any given moment, since it can be acquired repeatedly by the very same moment (so

this property does not set a given moment apart from the rest).

The third reason why interactivity in itself is not an indication of the fictional present is, as noted in section 2.1, that there are interactive anachronies. The possibility of 'bringing back the past' can also be integrated into the story itself in games including time travel: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo, 2000; henceforth *Majora's Mask*) is about Link travelling back in time and re-experiencing the same three days over and over until the end of the world (on the third day) can be prevented. Interactive anachronies and fictional time travel can possibly be explained in one of two ways. The first possible explanation is that the metaphysically privileged point in time is moved along with the player and that the moment which the player chooses to interact with is the fictional present only for as long as she stays in it, leading to the first two problematic factors already discussed above, the question-begging argument that the interactive moment must be present because it is interactive, and that this moment can move back and forth in time; in *Majora's Mask* the first day would become fictionally present every time Link rewinds time. In that case video games are not unique, because Ryan has argued, similarly to Thabet, that the reader of a book can be transported to the 'now of the storyworld' (2015, p.98). Ryan argues that this involves a shifted present and not merely being informed about events in a fictional past (2015, pp.105-6). This would mean that films and books can bring back the fictional present too, either through rewinding the film or rereading an earlier passage, or through a flashback, meaning that there is no reason to posit that game stories are interactive given that the feature of bringing back the fictional present is not unique to them. The second possible explanation is that the present moves at a steady pace and only in one direction, and that flashbacks and flash-forwards are representations of the past and future. Something similar has been argued by Yaffe: he argues that when the same event is shown twice in a film, it is

represented as a past event the second time (2003, p.128). If this is also true in games in the sense that flashbacks are representations of the past, it follows that the player's interaction is not limited to the present. In *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask* it would then mean that the present is not moved along with Link when he travels back in time, so he is actually relocated to the past. The same would obtain in *Max Payne*, so that the entire game is actually in the past if the first scene is the present. This would in turn mean that the player is able to interact with the past both in the case of flashbacks and voyages through time, but then it follows that games are not interactive because of their *presentness* (there are more problems related to this issue, which will be discussed later).

The fourth and final reason why interactivity in itself is not an indication of the fictional present is that the division between games and film/literature is ultimately a false dichotomy: many games consist partly of films and text, in the form of cutscenes and text-segments. If films and novels do not convey events in the fictional present, it follows that the gameplay before and after a cutscene/text segment takes place in the present, but that the events *within* the cutscene/text segment take place in the past – in virtue of being expressed in a non-interactive medium – which in practice would render all games with cutscenes/text segments temporally complex and contradictory.

An example makes this clear: in one mission in *Vice City* Tommy Vercetti storms the mansion of gangster lord Ricardo Diaz. The mission begins with a cutscene where Vercetti arms himself, then he kills Diaz's thugs in an interactive sequence, whereafter Diaz enters in a cutscene, is shot down in an interactive sequence, but Vercetti's *coup de grâce* is delivered in a cutscene. If interactive gameplay always conveys presentness and a film must therefore always convey pastness (as it is non-interactive), it follows that Vercetti arms himself in the past, kills Diaz's thugs in the present, then Diaz enters in the past, is shot down in the

present and killed in the past. This principle applies to text-segments too: if literature also signals pastness, it follows that, in *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask*, when Link approaches a character, the act of approaching is in the present, but the dialogue with the very same character – conveyed in text-boxes – is in the past.

Issues arising from assuming that the temporal locations of events can be derived from the medium of the narrative are exacerbated further when cut-scenes and gameplay convey events of different temporalities – e.g. when the interactive part is a flashback and the noninteractive is the fictional present, or vice versa – and this leads to even more counterintuitive results. In *Max Payne*, the first scene is a cutscene, and the second one is an interactive flashback. If films invariably convey pastness, it follows that the first scene (where Max reminisces over his dead family) is in the past, and the following (where he finds them in his bedroom recently killed) is in the present, i.e. after he reminisces about their death.³⁷

In games that mix gameplay and cut-scenes game theorists either have to sacrifice all causal and temporal congruity in the narrative along with the most intuitive interpretations of them – i.e. that text segments, cutscenes, and gameplay describe the same time-span – or they have to concede that films, novels, and games share the same temporal properties and intermittently represent the same events, meaning that both gameplay, text, and cutscenes take place in the present (or, more likely, in the past). Either way, games, films, and novels convey stories with the same temporal properties, meaning that game stories cannot be interactive only in virtue of having a fictional present.

³⁷ Note that this is *not* the same argument as in section 2.1.2: there the issues followed from the claim that games must convey their stories chronologically, here the problem follows from the claim that different media convey different temporal properties.

2.3.1 Temporality and narration

As already mentioned in section 2.1, some scholars appeal to the existence of some kind of fictional narrator located within the story who tells the events as if they were known facts, and this narrator could be used to establish the location of the fictional present. Le Poidevin considers the possibility of adopting the perspective of an 'internal narrator' who tells the story as truth and whose position is to count as the present (1988, pp.256-7). Le Poidevin's objection to this is that if the narrator's position in time does not change, then neither can the events narrated, and for that reason the events cannot constitute an A-series. This is correct, but Le Poidevin does not sufficiently explore this objection. He claims that in order for the narration to be present, it has to change its temporal position (since flow is an essential property of the A-series), but that there is no perspective from which we can say that the narration becomes past. This means, Le Poidevin says, either that the narration must be stuck in an eternal present, or that we have to establish a 'second-order' narration in relation to which the first narration becomes past, but then there has to be yet another order of narration with respect to which the second order becomes present and so on *ad infinitum* (1988, pp.256-7). However, *pace* Le Poidevin, we need not appeal to an external perspective relative to which the narration becomes past, because we can still accept that the story narrated is in the past relative to the first-order narration even without being able to assess the temporal location of said narration itself, so one could claim, similarly to this, that we could appeal to a second-order narration in order to locate the first-order narration temporally without having to locate the second-order narration. More importantly, if we say that the narration is in the present it follows that the events narrated are in the past, which is problematic for reasons already mentioned in section 2.1.

The principle of Le Poidevin's argument still stands, however: it is

problematic to place the narration in the same time-series as the events narrated, since it follows that the narration too must move in the A-series, receding further and further into the past, meaning that we cannot even say for certain whether the *narration* is in the present. If we instead say that the narration is in an eternal present, but still claim that the events narrated are in the past (relative to said narration), it follows that these events will not move in the A-series. Seeing how change is an essential property of A-series relations, and the narrated events do not move in the A-series (i.e. there is no change), it follows that the story is not an A-series but a B-series. From this it follows that no stories, regardless of medium, are necessarily in the present, since we cannot locate the time of narration, and if we *could* it would entail that the narration would not remain in the present for long before receding into the past. In neither case are video games different from other media, so there is no reason to believe that they are interactive because of their temporal properties.

2.3.2 The relation between an A-series and a B-series

Another solution to the problem of locating the fictional present is to presume that the first scene of the narrative is the temporal 'anchor' which determines the directions of anachronies, but Currie asserts that the first scene may itself be an anachrony, the exact nature of which is determined by following parts of the narrative (1995a, p.213). The broader implication following from this, as noted by Currie, is that this potentially leads to a regress, where one scene's potential capacity as anachrony is determined by another story event, which in turn must also be assessed in order to determine whether *that* is an anachrony or not. One could add that this method of locating the fictional present does not set video game narratives apart from other media: since narratives in all media have a first scene, all narratives would for that reason have a fictional present.

Currie says, referring to films, that we cannot ascertain the direction of an anachrony in terms of A-series properties. If we have two scenes that follow one another but are presented out of order, we cannot say whether the first scene is a flash-forward or the second scene is a flashback: 'The onscreen representation of Y occurs before the representation of X, but it is fictional that Y occurs after X. Do we have here a flashback or a flash-forward?' (Currie 1995a, p.213). In *Max Payne*, either the first scene on top of the skyscraper is a flash-forward relative to the second scene when Max finds his dead wife, or the discovery of the deceased spouse is a flashback relative to the scene on the skyscraper. The CoP, Currie explains, renders anachronies problematic, as a flashback is supposed to take place in the past, and we cannot see past events (1995a, pp.201-2). He explains that advocates of the CoP think that presentness is overridden by contextual cues, that the 'default' setting is present unless, for instance, a dissolve or pure narrative coherence indicates otherwise. Scenes from the past/future, Currie says, require another kind of interpretation (not imagining seeing), and could be seen as some kind of signs conveying what happened/will happen at another point in the story. Currie objects, as one cannot detect any experiential difference between watching scenes from the present and past respectively, so flashbacks can be identical to other parts of the film. From that it follows, Currie says, that we cannot identify any moment as present without identifying them all as such, since they are experienced identically. In a related vein, Cardwell notes that our inability to tell whether a shot is in the fictional past only by looking at it raises the question of how we can know that the shot in question is in the present (2003, p.87). In contrast to Currie, Le Poidevin contends that it is natural to assume that what is onscreen is in fact the fictional past (since he thinks fictional films look like documentaries), but adds that it is nevertheless hard to determine how remote that past is (2016, pp.320-1).

Currie and Cardwell are right in the sense that if we cannot determine whether a shot is past, it does not follow that one can assume that another temporal location (e.g. present) is the standard; the inability to determine one temporal location does not necessarily entail the ability to determine another. For the same reason we cannot identify a shot as past without identifying *all* of them as past. If one is open to moving the player to the present of a past event one could also posit, contrariwise, that the entire story is in the past and that in every scene the player is transported to another part of that past, not exclusively in flashbacks. The suggestion made by Thabet (among others), that the player is transported to the present of a past event is *ad hoc*, and from Currie's particular example of identifying the present we can conclude that no segment can be ascribed *any* A-series property – be it past, present, or future – without endowing all scenes with the same property.

However, Bourne and Caddick Bourne object to arguments pertaining to ascertaining the location of the fictional present, asserting that metaphysical properties of a time series – be it an A-series or a B-series – and the location of events within said time series are two independent issues (2016, p.37). They argue that if A-series properties are independent of a subject's perception of them, our inability to ascertain whether a moment is past, present, or future is irrelevant and does not in itself prove that the fictional timeline has no such properties; it only shows that we are not part of that time series, and if we are not part of it, we cannot expect to locate its present (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.35). Likewise, Le Poidevin says that we cannot locate the past in any time series but our own, but that just as a fictional world can have its own B-series disjoint from ours it can also have its own A-series (1988, p.251), and Yaffe argues that the fact that A-series properties are not necessary to describe anachronies is not in itself proof against the very existence of A-series properties in fiction (2003, p.124).

Currie unwittingly confirms this himself when he states that the ‘failure of cinema to represent fictional events as tensed is a failure to represent them as tensed *from the perspective of the viewer*, not from that of the characters’ (Currie 1995a, p.218; original emphasis). He compares this to how the fictional places are *spatially* present to the characters, a point which cannot be emphasized enough: just as we can obtain sufficient comprehension of spatial properties within the fiction in order to understand the game story without postulating that there is a metaphysically privileged point in *space*, we can ascertain *temporal* properties without postulating a metaphysically privileged point in *time*, yet several game theorists inexplicably insist on the importance of the latter but not the former. In *Ocarina of Time*, we understand where Kokiri Forest is in relation to Hyrule Castle and that Link lives in the first place before he arrives in the second, and that both places are *temporally* present for him at the moment they are *physically* present, but in neither case are we required to ascribe metaphysical privilege to any point in *space* to comprehend this, so it is equally unnecessary to ascribe metaphysical privilege to any point in *time*.

Bourne and Caddick Bourne also conclude that it is of little use to judge whether a given fictional event is present in relation to our timeline, nor can we claim that this moment is *fictionally* present (2016, p.37). Moreover, they object to the conclusion drawn by Currie and Le Poidevin, that fictional time must be a B-series for the reason that we cannot say that it has represented an A-series; Bourne and Caddick Bourne instead assert that it is indefinite in most fictions whether they are a B-series or an A-series (2016, p.38). This is an important point of theirs, as we must distinguish between $\sim F(p)$ and $F(\sim p)$; there is a difference between saying that it is not true in fiction F that p , and, on the other hand, that it is true in fiction F that not- p . This is also similar to Cardwell’s point, that our inability to ascertain the fictional past does not make a scene the fictional present; we

cannot derive the existence of one property exclusively from our inability to ascertain the existence of another, for that argument could easily be inverted by opponents in order to prove the contrary: if we cannot assess whether a timeline is exclusively a B-series, it does not for that reason automatically become an A-series.

In a related vein, Le Poidevin explains that a description using B-series terms can be 'translated into' one using A-series terms, so that in *Don Quixote* (Cervantes, 1612-1620), 'when the adventure of the windmills is present, the adventure of the galley-slaves is past' (Le Poidevin 2007, p.146). Similarly, Bourne and Caddick Bourne explain that anachronies can be explained in both B-series and in A-series terms, presenting the following definition: 'Film *F* contains anachrony iff *F* contains representations of fictional events *X* and *Y*, where the representation of *Y* in viewing time is past when that of *X* is present, but it is not fictional that the occurrence of *Y* is past when the occurrence of *X* is present' (2016, p.39). They concede that tenses are characterized relative to something else, but emphasize that these relations are not determined relative to each other, but to the present moment.

However, one problem with Le Poidevin's and Bourne and Caddick Bourne's conceptions of anachronies is that they do not show why we *should* think of a fictional time series as an A-series. Although we cannot relate fictional events to our world – in the sense that we cannot say whether fictional event *E* is posterior to, simultaneous with, or anterior to events in our world – we are nevertheless often able to ascribe B-series properties to fictional events in relation to one another. Even if we assess a given event's location in relation to the fictional present, as suggested by Bourne and Caddick Bourne, that only allows us to speak of fictional events' properties *relative to one another*, which does not reveal any more about a fictional event's temporal properties at any given moment

than its B-series properties do on their own. Hence, if we posit that in the series of events XYZ, event Y is present when event X is past and event Z is future, we still cannot derive from this at what moment Y is present, and it is precisely this possibility we require if we are to say that the story takes place in the fictional present. In *Vice City*, Tommy Vercetti's arrival in Vice City is past when he is confronting the gangster lord Diaz, and when this confrontation is present the game's final mission is in the future, but we still cannot say when the confrontation with Diaz is present, only that it is at *some* point. A description with A-series properties can be reduced to a conditional statement ('if Y is present, then X is past'), but since a conditional statement like this one does not assert its antecedent or consequent it remains to be shown is whether a given scene actually *is* present.

Bourne and Caddick Bourne claim that explanations of anachronies in terms of an A-series and a B-series respectively are equivalent, because if Y occurs after X, then Y is present when X is past; conversely, if Y is present when X is past, then Y occurs after X (2016, p.39). However, Currie states that relations in the B-series can be asserted without thinking of events as past/present/future (1995a, p.207). This sounds reasonable, because we can know that event X is prior to event Y even if we do not know whether X is past or present (as illustrated with the *Vice City*-example above). As should be evident by now, a time series can have B-series properties without having A-series properties, but it cannot have A-series properties without having B-series properties. Thus, we can say that X occurs later than Y or vice versa without positing that either of them is past or present. In *Vice City* Tommy Vercetti robs a bank, and we can say that the missions preparing the heist necessarily take place before the bank robbery itself without positing that one of these events is present. Conversely, we *cannot* say that the preparations are past events when the robbery is present without implying

that the former occurs before the latter.

One could object by saying that there are narratives that clearly indicate whether the following scene is in the past, present, or future. Currie explains that according to the CoP, contextual cues in a film (such as narration and/or dissolves) 'override' the default setting of presentness and represent past or future events (1995a, pp.201-2). Yaffe presents an example of this, saying that in a film where we see a gypsy looking into a crystal ball, the events seen by the gypsy are presented as either future or past (2003, pp.126-7). However, this does not refute my conclusion, because the events in the crystal ball are only presented as future relative to the gypsy, so when her observation is present, the events she sees are future. Yet again one can reduce the representation to B-series properties, and the addition of a present does nothing to improve our comprehension.

This indicates the existence of an asymmetry that prevents the explanations from being equivalent, *contra* Bourne and Caddick Bourne. If A-series properties can be arrived at only insofar as they reveal the same relationships between events that we have already uncovered by outlining B-series properties, there is little benefit in speaking of them, instead of limiting discussions to B-series properties. In brief, we can understand that a fictional event takes place before/after another without knowing which one is present.

2.3.3 The absence of B-series properties

It could be argued that not all events in narratives can be approached as if they constituted a B-series, and this could potentially strengthen the defence of A-series properties in game stories. Currie explains that in some sequences in films, temporal relations between events are not specified, so the order of the representation of events does not convey their order of occurrence (1995a, p.211). As an example he mentions 'summarizing' sequences that may show, for instance,

the arrival of aliens at various places on Earth: we see them land in Paris and then Washington, but this does not mean that the former takes place before the latter, but rather that it occurs at roughly the same time. Similarly, Bourne and Caddick Bourne argue that the order in which fictional events take place can be indeterminate (2016, p.240). As already shown in section 2.1, the order of sequences in the narrative need not necessarily mirror the order of occurrence, so this is nothing new in principle, but this particular example of Currie's takes matters one step further, as we cannot even 'reconstruct' the order of occurrence. Currie does not seem to realize that this potentially undermines the necessity of considering fictional time as a B-series, because that would require considering events in terms of their order of occurrence, and this is left indefinite in sequences like the aliens arriving at Earth. In games, this is an even more recurrent feature, but in a different respect: in *Vice City*, one can often choose in which order one wants to play missions; some have to be carried out before others, but there is often a selection of different missions that can be completed in any order before the story progresses. Moreover, some missions, side-quests, and miscellaneous tasks can be undertaken at any time. In such instances, it becomes impossible to judge which event precedes which in the fiction.

Does this mean that the story must be an A-series? Certainly not, because that would be to commit the fallacy mentioned above, of deriving the existence of one property from our inability to ascertain the existence of another. As already mentioned, Le Poidevin suggests that a fictional time series could have its own A- or B-series disjoint from ours, and although he is right that our inability to assess the existence of a fictional present does not in itself rule out its very existence – that would be to confuse ontology with epistemology – this inability indicates the futility of speaking of an A-series in game stories: everything that can be explained requires only the B-series, and that which cannot be explained is not changed by

the addition of a putative fictional present. If one accepts the existence of a disjoint A-series beyond our assessment one must be equally open to a disjoint B-series eluding our perception; even if we sometimes cannot structure events in relation to one another – as in *Vice City* – it does not follow that no such relations *exist*; it is unproblematic to say that either X took place before Y or vice versa without saying that X is either past, present, or future. Moreover, normally we *can* determine how a narrative's events relate to one another in terms of priority, simultaneity, and posteriority, and this is not altered in any way by claiming that an event is present.

2.3.4 The absence of A-series properties

So far I have argued against speaking of A-series properties, but this is different from claiming that a fictional world lacks these entirely. Before delving into this topic, it is important to distinguish between arguing that game narratives represent their stories as possessing *any* A-series property, as opposed to claiming that they represent *a specific* A-series property. By maintaining that games represent A-series properties in general, one still opens up the possibility that no A-series property in question must be presentness, because as Yaffe himself speculates, it could be the case that the narrative only represents, for instance, the story's past (2003, p.124). This would be in line with the standard conception of narratives as conveying past events, as mentioned in the introduction. Regardless of which of these options one chooses, if presentness is a prerequisite for making stories interactive it follows that a story without a present and one entirely set in the past should be equally non-interactive, regardless of medium. The question is then whether all stories must have a present, and if so, whether it must necessarily be represented in the narrative. Yaffe argues that the pastness or futurity of a given event is determined by its relation to the present, so that if one event is past, it follows that some following event must be present, even if it is never shown (2003,

p.130). I have three objections:

Firstly, it is important to note that it does not follow from Yaffe's conclusion that the present is ever *represented*, only that it *exists*; one must not forget the difference between a narrative *without a present* and a narrative *representing no event as present*. Yaffe is aware of this, but it cannot be emphasized enough.

Secondly, even if presentness is a necessary and inherent property of time, there could still be examples of 'impossible fiction' in which it is not true that there is a present. Yaffe dismisses this solution, arguing that representing something as past necessarily entails conveying that some other event is present (2003, p.130n23). The flaw of this line of reasoning is its assumption that the alternative would be illogical and contradictory, but the very definition of impossible fiction is that it does contain true contradictions. In impossible fiction it could be false to claim that there is a present, or it could be indefinite (neither true nor false). One could argue that the pastness and futurity of events is not defined in terms of their distance to the present – *pace* Yaffe (2003, p.130) – but their distance to one another. However, we cannot consider all fictions to be impossible by default, so we cannot presume that any story lacks a present unless there is good reason to do so. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that if one insists on the existence of a fictional present with reference to the inconceivability of impossible fiction, one must also – for the sake of consistency – refute all other kinds of impossible fiction, such as those including time travel. If one does not accept that *Majora's Mask* may lack a present, one cannot accept paradoxes following from Link's time-travelling. If, on the other hand, one accepts time-travel as a concept in fiction, one must invoke other reasons for rejecting the nonexistence/indefiniteness of a fictional present.

Thirdly, even if we accept that the representation of a fictional past entails the existence of a fictional present, and that A-series properties are necessary in

any conceivable time-series, there is *still* no persuasive reason for describing events in terms of past and present, as we get the same results by limiting ourselves to B-series properties. If fiction *F* consists of events XYZ it is evident that Y must possess the B-series property of posteriority in relation to X, but is redundant to posit that Y be present and X past; to do so anyway presumes rather than proves that fictional events have A-series properties. This becomes even more evident in *Sands of Time*. In the game, the player regularly experiences flash-forwards depicting the Prince traversing obstacles the player has yet to traverse. Applying the same logic as in Yaffe's case of the gypsy looking into her crystal ball, it seems intuitive to say that the flash-forwards are presented as future. However, the entire game is the Prince's narration of past events, so the flash-forwards are only presented as future *relative to the moment at which the Prince experienced them*. In other words, the events in the flash-forwards are posterior to the moment he had the vision of them, but the same events are in the past relative to his narration. This means that, *contra* Yaffe, not even obvious cases of flash-forwards necessarily prove the existence of a fictional present, for a flash-forward can represent events that are not necessarily in the future, but in a less distant past. The opposite narrative structure could be said to obtain: in a story entirely made up of flash-forwards representing the future relative to the moment of narration, a flashback could present an event in a less distant future, not necessarily in the *past*. In neither of these cases is it necessary to say that the story takes place in the fictional present.

Thus, there is no reason to presume that a story in any medium represents a fictional present. This can be either because the story only possesses or, alternatively, only represents a past and a future but no present. In a narrative where either of these options obtains, it follows that the recipient never sees the fictional present. If either/both of these options are possible in literary and/or

cinematic stories, there is no reason why the same could not apply in games.

Yaffe, however, contends that a film cannot lack A-series properties entirely, arguing that it would fail to represent duration homomorphically (2003, p.131), but this is not a valid argument. It is true that if A-series properties are represented *automorphically*, then duration must also be represented automorphically, since the presentness of the representation would move at the same rate as the presentness of the fictional event. This correlation between presentness and duration, however, does not obtain inversely: even if we were to concede, only for the sake of the argument, that the duration is always conveyed automorphically – which it is not, as shown in section 1.3 – it does not follow that the putative presentness of the event is also conveyed automorphically; if five minutes of screen/play time conveys five minutes of story time it does not follow that these five minutes must therefore be the in the fictional present.

More importantly, Yaffe seems to forget that a homomorphic representation of duration only conveys the fact that a given event has some duration, but this fact does not entail that a given event must have any A-series properties, nor that it has said properties in virtue of the medium conveying it. As mentioned earlier, it is an essential property of the A-series that the relations move, but I have already given examples of when this is not the case: whenever the player pauses the game to reach the inventory screen in *Ocarina of Time* or *Resident Evil 4*, or chooses a response in conversations in an RPG, the putative present ceases to move. These examples could still count as homomorphic representations of duration, since the duration of the pause can be seen as representing that the event of Link choosing a weapon has some duration, but the fact that temporal progression is sometimes interrupted should rule out the possibility of it being an A-series. Otherwise one would have to describe the flow of time as erratic and arbitrary, and that would be an *ad hoc* move with the purpose of defending the

existence of A-series properties in game stories.

In conclusion, if neither our comprehension nor our experience is influenced by the introduction of A-series properties, it seems superfluous to speak of them to begin with. Either it is not possible to locate the fictional present in video games, and therefore irrelevant to speak of it, or there is no reason to assume that games are the only medium able to convey a story taking place in the present. In both cases, game stories do not differ fundamentally in terms of temporality from stories in other media, and if interactivity supervenes on temporality, then there is no reason to claim that game stories are interactive and that literary or cinematic ones are not.

To return to the three claims in the introduction:

- 1) game stories are in the present
- 2) temporal properties of game stories are different from those of stories in other media
- 3) the conjunction of 1) and 2) in game stories allows the player to interact with them

As has become clear in the last two chapters, all three claims can be rejected. Games are not in the present, temporal properties of game stories are not different from those in other media, and since neither of the premises obtain, the consequence in 3) does not obtain either.

Chapter 3 – Authorship and actual intentionalism

In the first half of the thesis I examined whether the player could be said to influence the story because of video games' temporal properties; the obvious counter-argument is that authorship in other media does not depend on a medium's temporal properties. An author/director controls the story of her novel/film regardless of when the events are said to take place, so players could be authors of game stories even if this cannot be supported with reference to temporal properties. In the following two chapters of the thesis I examine possible defences of why players have some authorship of the narrative. Game scholars often mention authorship but rarely (if ever) explicitly refer to so-called 'intentionalism', although their arguments are redolent of (sometimes almost identical with) this school of interpretation, according to which fictional truth is determined by the author. The fact that they do not use this particular term is irrelevant, seeing how their reasoning corresponds to it so well. This chapter adopts the premise that the player is an author and sees what consequence it has, whereas the next one examines the more modest claim that the player is merely a coauthor.

3.1 Authorship and intentionalism in game studies

Before discussing the player's purported authorship I will present a brief overview of what has been said about authorship in general as well as specifically in relation to video games. In this section I first present scholars who emphasize the comparatively fixed nature of video game stories, then those who stress the collaboration between player and designer and, lastly, scholars with a more nuanced view of the authority of players. This is a rough distinction, and several of

these scholars present so diverse (almost contradictory) theories that they could belong in more than one of these groups.

It has been argued by some that games have an 'ideal path' which the player should follow, or that there is an overarching structure/framework created by the designer within which the player is offered a limited amount of control and interactivity, but from which she cannot deviate significantly (King 2002, p.51; King and Krzywinska 2002, p.23; Atkins 2003, p.41; Aarseth 2004b, p.366-7; Schott 2006, pp.133-4; Saklofske 2007, p.142). For instance, Murray emphasizes the distinction between authoring an environment and playing a creative role within it, and argues that players are not authors, since the system they use has been created by someone else (1997, pp.152-3). Similarly, Simons argues that the player 'is not able to form any intentions within the dramatic world that actually matter' (2007), and that although other scholars have argued that the player can influence a game's outcome, this is actually not the case; the player may not know the outcome, but it is still clear which ones are possible. Lorenzo Servitje suggests that most action, adventure, and shooter games allow players to interact with the diegetic game world (2014, p.381), but nonetheless asserts the game *Dante's Inferno* (Visceral Games, 2010) has a 'preprogrammed narrative' (2014, p.378). Betty Kaldamanidou and Maria Katsaridou argue that players shape the narrative within limitations of the manufacturer but also that the narrative is scripted beforehand (2013, p.266), and, drawing on Bernard Perron, claim that players of *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999) perhaps choose one of several alternative paths (2013, p.267). They draw parallels to literature, and say that although players may construct different stories, readers may likewise visualize things differently (Kaldamanidou and Katsaridou 2013, p.273). Contrariwise, Gonzalo Frasca is sceptical about narratological approaches to games, but nevertheless maintains

that players cannot know the outcome of their session since the sequence of events is not fixed, although the creator of the game ultimately has the most authority in matters of which events will occur and how frequently (2003b, pp.227-8).

Contrary to the aforementioned scholars, others have stressed the collaborative nature of video game narratives and how they offer more interactivity than 'traditional' ones, even if opinions vary as to how much control the player really has. Several scholars argue that games blur the distinction between a passive audience and active participant (Wolf 2001a, p.3, 2001d, p.93, 2001e, p.114; Pearce 2004a, pp.151-3, 2004b, p.147; Buckingham 2006, pp.182-3; Davidson 2008, pp.27-30; Holmes 2012, pp.1-4, p.41; Laurel 2014, p.27). Laurel compares human-computer interaction with improvisational theatre (2014, pp.86-7) and contends that players create their own distinct paths and outcomes not necessarily foreseen by the designer (2014, pp.110-11), even if designers implement constraints (2014, p.131). Similar to this, Bob Rehak argues that in video games, spectatorship and participation are merged in the avatar (2003, p.103). Reed suggests that players are endowed with agency in the construction of the game narrative (2016, p.626). Similarly, Barry Atkins argues that the player is engaged in the construction and telling of the story (2003, pp.43-4), that each text is unique (2003, p.72), and that every player is an author (2003, p.153). In a related vein, Erwin Warkentin argues that it is not the people creating the game mechanisms but rather the players who author the narrative (2011, p.274). In a similar fashion, Backe asserts that the way one plays the game determines what kind of character becomes the protagonist of the story and how the story progresses (2012, pp.255-8). Contrary to this, Carr suggests that some events in a game are determined by the player, although these acts are shaped by

parameters within the game, which precludes the player from a complete authorial role (2006, p.39, p.43). A similar claim is made by Hanson, according to whom players partly determine what is part of the game world, and therefore cocreate their experiences with the designers (2018, p.104). Contradicting some of his own claims, Aarseth claims that if there is a story in a game, the player can be seen as its creator (1997, p.112). Chris Bateman does not think that the player's agency precludes authorial intent (2011, pp.85-6), but nonetheless suggests that the game designer 'has authorial control over the player's experience' (2011, p.88).

Some scholars note that the amount of control the player is given can differ between games and argue that the player can influence the outcome (Egenfeldt-Nielsen Smith, and Tosca 2008, p.170; Ulas 2014, pp.80-1; L. Joyce 2015, p.48, p.53, 2016; Thabet 2015, pp.5-6). Ryan distinguishes between exploratory and ontological interactivity, the latter meaning that user interaction becomes part of the story world and that in some kinds of games the player 'writes' the history of the fictional world, which is created rather than enacted (2004, p.349, 2015, pp.162-4). Similarly, Dubbelman claims that different games offer the player different roles, either as an 'implied author who guides the hero through his trials and tribulations', or 'an embodied participant in the world of the story' (both quotes from 2011, p.158), which allows the player to have adventures on her own in her capacity as hero (2011, p.169). Zachary Wendler makes a similar distinction, not between player-roles, but between narratives in the *Portal*-games (Valve, 2007-2011), 'the overt, scripted narrative, and the subsumed, implied, unscripted narrative which the player must actively engage with to cocreate' (2014, p.354), and contrasts the *Portal*-games with other games, which merely allowed the player to choose between predetermined paths (2014, p.366). Ekber Ulas argues that narratives in interactive media have to be approached differently from other media,

since a crucial point in the former is that the user is granted the possibility to manipulate narrative sequences (2014, p.76). In a related vein, Barry Ip has argued that the level of interaction stands in direct proportion to the perceived influence the player has on the game story (2011, p.105). Jenkins distinguishes between, on the one hand, enacted and embedded narratives, where the player merely advances or reconstructs the plot, and, on the other hand, emergent narratives, the stories constructed by players themselves (2004, p.129). According to Mata Haggis, the extent of the player's control is decided upon by the designer, and the player's actions may be out of place in the narrative setting (such as guiding the character clumsily) (2016, p.22-4). Related to this, Perlin argues that characters in video games differ fundamentally from those in novels and films in the sense that the agency belongs to the player (2004, pp.12-15).

Thabet goes into more detail than many others discussing these matters. He is aware that readers also create meaning in the encounter with a literary narrative, but nevertheless emphasizes the difference between reading a novel and playing a game, arguing that in the former case, one assembles textual clues, piecing together factors embedded in the text, whereas in the latter, 'the player projects his or her own narrative voice through his or her own expression, which leaves a personal mark' (2015, p.21). Like some theorists mentioned above, Thabet is aware of how the game-world limits and guides the player (2015, pp.6-7, p.17), and asserts that the player's narrating ability is subordinate to that of the program code (2015, p.43). Thabet vacillates between claiming that the player *is* the protagonist (2015, p.7, pp.58-9), and that she *impersonates* him/her, telling his/her story (2015, pp.32-3, p.41). Regardless, he maintains that the player's influence on the events and characters is not imagined, they really change (Thabet 2015, p.8). Thabet refers to the player as a 'discourse producing narrator' (2015,

p.24) who can produce a 'counter-discourse' which defies that of the game system (2015, p.41). She can include information that changes the meaning of the narrative, and he mentions how in *Penumbra Overture* (Frictional Games, 2007) the player decides whether the protagonist is a victim avoiding confrontation or someone who resists and faces his fears. Discussing *Max Payne* and *Bioshock* (2K, 2007), Thabet asserts that if the player does not bother with finding certain pieces of additional information, the outcome will be different (2015, pp.24-7). One factor that allows selection and arrangement of information is the player's control of the camera, which Thabet likens to editing in films (2015, pp.26-7, pp.42-3). When a person replays a game, Thabet thinks that the player's own personal development as well as her familiarity with the game's world, events, and characters can give a radically different ending, meaning-making process, and plot direction (2015, p.61, p.69).

Thabet also seems to place an emphasis on the perspective one adopts in a game, arguing that in first-person games the player's personal traits and interests replace those of the protagonist (except in cinematic sequences where the system takes control) (2015, pp.40-1). This he contrasts with third-person games, where the player is still a narrator of a discourse conflicting with that of the game world, but here the player is absent from the story (2015, pp.40-1). One reason for this is the lack of camera-control, since the camera constantly centres on the avatar, emphasizing its centrality in the story (Thabet 2015, pp.41-2). Thabet still maintains that the player controls the protagonist, but she becomes more distanced from the narrative, she tells someone else's story (Thabet 2015, p.42).

Philosophical approaches to authorship in video games exist, but do not differ significantly from what game scholars say. Cremin asserts that the game is

only realized through the collaboration between player and the artist (2012, p.73). Mukherjee contends that the player can be told of events, but also that she can orchestrate them, thus becoming an author, and he mentions first-person shooters, like *Doom* (id Software, 1993), as examples of games without a single ending (2015, p.55), but later on, being more hesitant as to whether the player or game designer is the author of *Sands of Time*, concludes that authorship in games is a complex matter and that the player's control is limited by the game's algorithms (2015, pp.146-8, p.155). Similar to Wolf (2001e, 114), Mukherjee considers death in a game as a possible ending (2015, p.136). He is aware that this raises the question of whether the same story is told when the game is replayed, and paradoxically enough he thinks that the story is the same and that all narratives emerging from a given game's narrative are actually the *same* narrative, whilst still believing that each playthrough is singular and has its own unique outcome (Mukherjee 2015, pp.139-43). Tavinor claims, drawing upon Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, (similar to Laurel) that the player is a combination of audience and performer, who can determine the game's narrative content as long as its narrative is not too fixed (2005, p.34, 2009, p.59, 2017, pp.25-6). He maintains that a player is nevertheless unlike a performer of a theatre play, as players lack a script and the specified performance in it, and are therefore able to determine fictional events, meaning that a violent playthrough will generate a bleaker narrative (2009, pp.58-60; 2017, p.27). Like several game scholars, Tavinor too acknowledges how authorial decisions impute the game with constraints on what narrative can be created by the player (2017, p.29), but nevertheless maintains that 'the player is able to manipulate and interact with the fictional environment' (2005, p.26). The conception of games as more interactive than other media is also shared by Willis (2019), Nathan Wildman and Richard Woodward (2018), and Ali (2015).

In brief, although views of player authorship are somewhat diverse in game studies and in philosophy, in general the player is ascribed some kind of authorship, even if it is often readily acknowledged that she does not possess full and/or consistent authority. This does not undermine my claim that they see player intentions as determining narrative content, because firstly, the assumption that the designer is also an author says nothing about the extent of her authorship, and secondly, to repudiate the necessity of the player's intentions whilst retaining the conception of the player as an author would constitute an odd definition of authorship; if an author can never realize her intentions, it is unclear in what sense she is still an author. More importantly, if one does not believe that authorial intentions have any bearing on the narrative it would not matter to whom we ascribe authorship, making it superfluous to defend the conception of the player as author.

Note that if each player is an author and fictional truth is determined by the author's intentions, it follows that each player generates a unique narrative by playing the game.³⁸ This is problematic, and should fundamentally undermine video game criticism if an infinite number of stories can be generated by every game, but in this chapter I presume that game scholars are prepared to 'bite the bullet' and accept this. There are other reasons why intentionalism is problematic if the player is the author, and these will be examined in this section.

3.2 Criticism and defence of actual intentionalism

In this section I examine actual intentionalism and its applicability in video games when the player is seen as the creator of the story. The reason why this is

³⁸ This view is similar to so-called 'radical constructivism', according to which all interpreters create their own fiction through their interaction with a narrative. I will not discuss this school of interpretation any further since it is outside the scope of the thesis. For more on constructivism, see Stecker (2005, p.11ff).

important to the thesis is that if player intentions have no impact on truth in fiction, it would be pointless to declare players authors of stories in games; if authorial intentions do not matter, it does not matter to whom they belong. In this section I thus adopt the assumption that the player is the author of the story and therefore has the final say regarding fictional truth, and I examine what consequences this has.

Actual intentionalism comes in different variants, and according to the extreme kind, the meaning of an artwork is defined entirely by the author (Carroll 2002, pp.322-3). Not all scholars adhere to the most extreme version, and I will distinguish between Extreme Actual Intentionalism (or EAI for short) and Moderate Actual Intentionalism (MAI). Some of the scholars referred to in this section are moderate intentionalists, but I only refer to their theories insofar as they correspond to EAI; problems unique to MAI will be discussed in the next section.

EAI is usually criticized by modern scholars and regarded as untenable (Stock 2017, pp.13-14). One common challenge to EAI is what is sometimes referred to as the 'Intentional Fallacy', that is, the thought that a work obtains a meaning only because the author intended it to; the objection is that authorial intentions are not desirable for interpretations, because those intentions are fallible insofar as a work (or a part of it) may not convey what an author wanted it to, and, conversely, it may express things she did *not* intend (Beardsley 1992, pp.26-7; Walton 1995, pp.333-4; Currie 1990, p.115ff, 1995a, pp.243-9, 2003, p.299, 2004, p.124; Nathan 1992, p.187; Shusterman 1992b, pp.168-9; Carroll 1997a, p.305, 2000, pp.76-80; Rosebury 1997, p.19, p.28n11; Phillips 1999, pp.276-7; Trivedi 2001, p.196, 2015, p.704; Livingston 1998, pp.831-2, 2003, p.281, 2005, pp.146-50; Irvin 2006, pp.114-16; Sellors 2007, p.268, Stecker 2008, pp.38-9; Mikkonen 2009; Kindt and Müller 2011, p.71; Davies and Stecker 2010, p.311; Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016, p.102, pp.213-15). The theory that a work means whatever

the author intended is sometimes referred to as 'The Identity Thesis' (Dickie and Wilson 1995, p.234; Carroll 1997a, p.305; Wilson 1997, p.310; Dickie 2006, p.77; Stecker 2005, p.149, 2008, p.38; Davies and Stecker 2010, p.309), a notion coined by Monroe Beardsley (1992, p.25). It is sometimes compared to how Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (Carroll, [1871]1999) claims that words mean whatever he wants them to when he claims 'glory' can mean 'nice knock-down argument' (Iseminger 1992a, p.79, 1996, pp.321-3; Livingston 1998, p.831, 2003, pp.283-4; Leddy 1999, p.226; Carroll 2000, p.76; D. Davies 2004, p.85n3; Irvin 2006, p.116; Levinson 2010, p.145; Gover 2012, p.170). It has also been argued that although the author's intentions are inevitably connected to the construction of the story it does not follow that they are as pertinent to the work's meaning (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954, p.375; Chatman 1990, pp.82-4; Shusterman 1992a, p.66; Lyas 1992, p.144; Phillips 1999, p.275; Trivedi 2001, p.195n7; Livingston 2003, p.281; Kiefer 2005, p.276; Mikkonen 2009).

A practical problem is that the author's intentions may not be available to us. The author may be dead, the artwork may be too vague to make the intention graspable, and no surviving documents may exist to elucidate the interpreter; if the author is alive we may still not know her intentions for certain, because she may wish to deceive her readers, or may not remember or have a good grasp of her own intentions (Carroll 1992, p.99; Iseminger 1992a, p.86; Lyas 1992, pp.141-2; Stecker 1997 p.201; Bronson 2002, p.207; Currie 2004, pp.107-8; Livingston 2005, p.32; Irvin 2006, p.117; Abbott 2008, p.229; Mikkonen 2009; Lamarque 2009, p.116; Fernflores 2010, pp.71-3; Trivedi 2015, pp.705-6).

Another criticism directed against EAI is its exaggerated focus on intentions to the detriment of work-meaning (Currie 1993, p.418, 1995a, p.246, 2003, p.295, 2004, pp.124-7; Livingston 1998, p.833; Leddy 1999, p.228; Carroll 2000, p.77;

Kiefer 2005, p.280; Stecker 2005, pp.128-30, p.148; Irvin 2006, p.116; Lamarque 2009, p.162; Stock 2017, p.37). An intentionalist response to this is that the work is the best (or at least adequate) evidence of authorial intentions (Stecker 1997 p.201, 2002a, p.131; Irwin 1999, p. 61; Carroll 2000, pp.77-8, 2002, p.326, 2011, p.128; Lintott 2002, pp.69-70; Irvin 2006, p.116; Trivedi 2015, p.702).³⁹

EAI is rarely endorsed by modern scholars, but there are noteworthy exceptions. Stock claims that authorial intentions are both necessary and sufficient for determining fictional content (2017, p.14). Her definition of fictional truth goes as follows: 'An author *Au*'s utterance *x* (or set of utterances *S*) has fictional content that *p*, if and only if: *Au* utters *x* (or *S*) intending that i) *x* (or *S*) should cause *F*-imagining that *p* in her intended readership *R*; ii) *R* should recognize this intention; and iii) *R*'s recognition of this intention should function as part of *R*'s reason to *F*-imagine that *p*' (Stock 2017, p.15).⁴⁰

Stock forestalls some objections pertaining to the Identity Thesis and Humpty-Dumptyism: if one believes an action to be impossible, one cannot intend to do it (2017, p.17). An author who expects readers to find a meaning for which there is no evidence in the text did not *really* intend the text to have this meaning (Stock 2017, p.88). Thus, an author cannot intend readers to interpret a sentence in a particular way if she does not expect them to recognize this meaning and her intention for them to grasp it (Stock 2017, pp.40-2).⁴¹ Stock claims that extreme cases – such as a highly irrational person intending a completely arbitrary sound to mean something – are exceptional, and that her theory still applies to works by

³⁹ Carroll later contradicts himself when he says that sources outside the work may 'supply a more effective means to our ends' (2000, p.83).

⁴⁰ What 'F-imagine' means is irrelevant for our purposes; Stock explains that there is no harm in thinking of it as imagining in general.

⁴¹ Walton says something similar (1990, p.110). Cf. Leddy (1999, pp.225-6) and Stecker (2006, p.431) who similarly emphasize that words can acquire unconventional meanings, provided that these can be grasped in the context.

people without such irrational beliefs (2017, p.44n31).

William Irwin, similar to Stock, emphasizes how intentions are constrained by the belief that one could possibly be understood (2015, pp.141-5).⁴² Moreover, an intention only determines truth in fiction if the author intended to communicate it to the reader (Irwin 2015, pp.145-6).⁴³ Contrary to Stock, Irwin contends that intentions determine meaning even when an agent intends a word to have an unconventional meaning no rational person would expect others to grasp, provided that this agent sincerely believes her listener will grasp it; thus, Humpty Dumpty *can* make 'glory' mean 'nice knock-down argument', provided that he has the requisite belief that he could be understood, otherwise he merely *wills* it (1999, pp.58-60, 2015, pp.142-3, p.146). Neither Irwin nor Stock see authors as completely reliable sources of information, either because authors themselves may not know their true intentions or because they attempt to deceive their readers (Irwin 1999, p.12, p.41, p.64, 2002a, pp.193-4, 2015, pp.142-6; Stock 2017, pp.17-18).

EAI is usually discussed primarily in relation to literary works, but has been applied to some extent to visual art-forms. Noël Carroll argues that the lack of conventions in non-literary arts forces the interpreter to focus on the artist's intentions instead, and mentions film as an example (1997a, p.306).⁴⁴ However, he nevertheless maintains that images cannot mean whatever the artist wants them to (2011, p.120). Hans Maes applies intentionalism to contemporary visual arts, such as paintings and sculptures, with the motivation that this is an area where

⁴² The difference between belief and intention has also been noted by Livingston (2003, p.277).

⁴³ A similar point is raised by Trivedi (2015, p.704).

⁴⁴ However, Walton mentions examples of conventions in both theatre and cartoons (1990, pp.171-2).

Carroll later conceded that dance has conventions but nevertheless acquires meaning 'by way of imitating human actions rather than by means of a code' (2011, p.126). Why codes and imitation of human actions are mutually exclusive he does not say.

actual and hypothetical intentionalists⁴⁵ reach different conclusions about the work-meaning (as opposed to literature, where the similarities between their respective interpretations make it hard to settle who is right); critics favour the intention of the artist, and the intuitive, reasonable answer to questions of what a work means is the one taking into account the intentions of the artist (Maes 2010, pp.134-5). A common objection from opponents of EAI is to underscore the difference between the meaning of an utterance and that of the utterer, and the fact that not all intentions are successfully realized, but Maes refers to actual practice, where people in the art world support EAI by considering artists' intentions in their analyses of their works (2010, pp.136-7).⁴⁶ As an example he mentions Pietromarchi's artwork consisting of over-sized light bulbs purportedly referring to the artist's childhood, an interpretation not arrived at by people disregarding artistic intentions (Maes 2010, pp.131-2). This does not mean that a work can mean practically anything: drawing upon Carroll and Gary Iseminger, Maes posits a minimal success condition which must be fulfilled, that the artist's intention 'is utterance meaning-determinative if it is compatible with and supportable by the text or artefact taken in its intended context' (2010, p.137n61).

K.E. Gover objects to Maes defence of EAI in the visual arts. He notes that if it is only because of the artist's intentions that light bulbs refer to childhood, it is unclear how one could separate successful attempts at artistic expressions from failed ones; the fact that there is no clear connection between the work and the artist's childhood – save for the artist's own explanation – means that a work can mean almost anything (Gover 2012, p.174-5). Maes's success-condition is so small that the work can mean whatever the artist claims; one must distinguish

⁴⁵ Hypothetical intentionalism 'holds that the interpreter is to surmise what a hypothetical author could have intended the work to mean' (S. Davies 2006, pp.223-4).

⁴⁶ Carroll (2011, p.132) and Stock (2017, p.13) also claim that people often invoke authorial intentions, but neglect that this is descriptive.

between artworks where an artist's explanation clarifies how the work embodies the purported meaning and those where the 'explanation' consists of the artist's personal associations elicited by the work (Gover 2012, p.175). Another objection is that Maes is begging the question by presuming that one accepts the artist's explanation as the true interpretation of the work (Gover 2012, p.176). Gover also notes that a sculpture, as opposed to a word, has objective features which can be verified empirically but lacks any conventional meaning, and he is sceptical of how the difference between literary and other kinds of works has been ignored in the debate on actual intentionalism, which makes him wonder to what extent debates pertaining to literature can elucidate questions pertaining to non-literary works (2012, pp.178-9).

3.3 Extreme intentionalism in games

If we accept the premise that the player is in some sense the author of the story, does that mean that her intentions can be decisive when determining the work-meaning? Although Maes primarily discusses contemporary visual art, his discussion can be applied to all visual arts, even those imbued with narratives, such as films and video games. Even Gover should accept it to a certain extent since he admits that films have some conventional meaning in their capacity of representational medium (2012, p.180) (a feature they share with games), and since both actual and hypothetical intentionalists agree that the principles arrived at can also be applied to the non-linguistic arts (Carroll 1997a, p.306, 2002, p.331n17; Stecker 2005, p.152; Trivedi 2015, p.699).

One fundamental problem of Maes' reasoning is that he underscores the fact that actual and hypothetical intentionalism will reach different conclusions about the work-meaning and then presumes that for this reason the actual

intentionalists must be right, since they take authorial intentions into account.⁴⁷ The disagreement between actual and hypothetical intentionalists is contingent and descriptive, it does not prove anything, let alone settle the dispute in the actual intentionalist's favour. On the contrary, hypothetical intentionalists may equally refer to the disagreement as an argument in *their* favour, as they do not accept the premise that authorial intentions determine work-meaning, and would argue that an artwork which cannot be understood without elucidation from the artist is a failed artwork, one that does *not* convey what the artist intended. Likewise, if we cannot understand the story in a game without the player explaining it to us, it hardly proves that intentionalism must be adopted, but rather that the player does not successfully convey the intended story. We can still accept EAI in visual arts such as video games, but Maes shows that this acceptance is axiomatic, it does not follow from his arguments but must be assumed prior to any interpretation. If we do accept EAI we are still left with the question of how to avoid Humpty-Dumptyism, an issue which Maes, Stock, and Irwin fail to resolve satisfactorily.

3.3.1 Infallibility of authorial intentions

Maes, Irwin, and Stock acknowledge the need for a minimal success condition. Both Stock and Irwin distinguish between actually intending and merely willing a string of words to mean something, and insist on the possibility of inferring the author's intention if that intention is to obtain. This is in principle quite similar to what Maes says about his condition (that the work be compatible with authorial intentions), but more refined. Maes does not explain what it means for a work to be compatible with artistic intentions, and as Gover notices, his condition is so small that we cannot distinguish between an author's *explanation* of meaning and mere *projection*. This flaw in Maes' reasoning becomes more clear in one of his

⁴⁷ The same fallacy can be found in Carroll (1992, pp.119-24).

other articles – not cited by Gover – where he argues that any explanation by an artist will be sufficiently compatible with the work to obtain (Maes 2008, pp.87-8). Maes goes so far as to argue that the meaning of an artwork is what the author intended it to be, even when the artist does not successfully communicate it (2008, p.93). If work-meaning is always equivalent to artistic intentions it does follow, as Maes indicates, that the failure to communicate these does not alter the meaning; meaning is a metaphysical matter, the interpreter's uptake is an epistemic one. However, this makes Maes' minimal success-condition so small that artistic intentions become infallible. Any meaning can be said to have been expressed by virtue of being attached by the artist to a particular artefact, effectively Humpty-Dumptyism. In video games, this would mean that the player would always successfully endow gameplay with whatever story she wants, because any gameplay is in and of itself sufficient evidence of her intention. She could play the zombie-game *Resident Evil 4* and intend it to have the story from *The Godfather* because the slaughtering of zombies evoke the same feelings in her as when she saw that film, similar to how light bulbs convey a message about childhood because those are the emotions elicited in Pietromarchi. The advantage of Maes' intentionalism is that it would make it possible for the player to be the author of the narrative and to make choices meaningful to the story, but it would also preclude any 'proper' interpretation of art if works may possess meanings impossible to grasp only because the artist claims they do. Thus, EAI as it is conceived by Maes is untenable, and cannot be used to defend the idea of player as author.

Stock's and Irwin's distinction between intending and willing adds a reasonable success-condition which can be adopted without difficulties in visual arts such as films and games. If we posit that meaning must be inferable we avoid the arbitrary ascription of elusive meaning that Maes seems to defend. Hence, a player cannot intend *Resident Evil 4* to have the story of *The Godfather*, because

this meaning cannot be inferred. Their requirement is problematic, however, since it does not specify to whom the meaning must be reasonably inferable. It has been noted that an artist may intend a given work to be seen by no one except herself (Gaut 1997, p.171n34), and several game scholars above claim that the player is both author and audience. If the player is the only audience, does that not mean anything she does can convey practically any intention, since she will always be able to grasp what she herself intends to do?⁴⁸

Stock claims that the author cannot intend a text to carry a certain meaning if she believes it to be impossible for the interpreter to decipher said meaning, and draws the conclusion that for this reason completely arbitrary and private meanings are not possible (2017, pp.74-5). However, this is a *non sequitur*: if the player is the only intended audience and she believes herself to be able to grasp the meaning, it should allow her to include arbitrary and private meanings. Furthermore, even if the author intends no one to read it, Stock explains that she may still intend the work to encourage certain acts of imagination, should someone read it anyway (2017, pp.29-30). The same argument has been put forward by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (1994, p.46) and Currie (1990, p.34). Similarly, Paisley Livingston has argued that as soon as the creator makes her intentions manifest (for instance by writing down her thoughts) they become publicly observable (2005, p.71). Their arguments do not entirely solve the problem, but they do show that video games are not unique in this aspect: we could grant that the creator of a work can use any means to convey her intentions

⁴⁸ Kania (2018, p.193) doubts that players communicate with themselves when playing, and Dickie and Wilson (1995, p.243) criticize the very concept of communication directed at the speaker. Dickie and Wilson's argument is dubious – people do arguably communicate with themselves through personal notes – and Kania uses a board-game to prove his point, neglecting the difference between these and video games. Furthermore, my argument does not hinge on whether players *do* communicate with themselves, but whether they could grasp their own intentions if they *did*.

if the work is directed at herself – since she is the only person intended to appreciate it, so she can expect herself to understand an idiosyncratic means of communication – but that applies to all art-forms, not only games. It would entail that an author could indeed mean ‘glory’ to mean ‘nice knock-down argument’, if she knows her future self will understand this, so neither Stock nor Livingston obviate Humpty-Dumptyism in any medium.⁴⁹

Does EAI lead to Humpty-Dumptyism when the author is also the only interpreter? Not necessarily, but a better refutation than the ones above would be to question the idea of whether we can intend even ourselves to grasp intentions if the relation between meaning and artwork is too arbitrary. Thomas Leddy argues that even when writing for ourselves we are still constrained by what we find to be plausible (1999, p.223). This indicates that although an author writing to herself may know her own intentions, it does not follow that her future self will be able to grasp, for instance, that ‘glory’ means ‘nice knock-down argument’ through engagement with the literary work, and if the future self cannot be expected to grasp this through the writing, the present self cannot intend it. It could be objected that the player interprets her own story in the act of playing and so the story is directed at her *present* self, but that does not change the principle of what can be intended. A player claiming that her playthrough of *Resident Evil 4* conveys the story of *The Godfather* does not grasp this by virtue of her engagement with the narrative; instead, she performs two *separate* acts of wanting the game to possess a certain meaning and being aware of this intention, but that knowledge is

⁴⁹ One could argue that we should rather speak of an *appropriate* audience, determined in relation to the work and its provenance (Levinson 1992, pp.227-8). However, that would not solve our current issue, since the author could be the only appropriate audience. One could then object with reference to concepts such as private language, but like Irwin (1999, pp.71n117) I merely consider alternative uses of a semiotic system to convey one’s intentions, I do not defend the notion of a language which could be understood by a single person (i.e. it is *contingent* that the author is the only appropriate audience).

unrelated to her engagement with the narrative. Rejecting the distinction between these acts would entail unwarranted ascription of causality to events with no necessary correlation: there would be no difference between imagining that p whilst engaged with the narrative, and imagining that p because one is prescribed by the narrative to do so (recall: recognition of the intention to imagine p is part of Stock's definition of fictional truth). To take a literary example: if a person writes 'feed the cat' she will be reminded to feed her cat *because of* the note, but if she also happens to remember that she has to make dinner for her children she is reminded of this *whilst* reading the note, but the note as such only has a necessary impact on the first act of remembering. In the same way, a player can think of the story from *Godfather* whilst playing *Resident Evil 4*, but not *because* she is playing it (barring personal associations not prescribed by the game itself). Therefore she does not intend the game to have this story, she only wants it and happens to know about this intention, similar to how we may know that an artist wanted two light bulbs to represent childhood without granting that the artwork manages to convey this. Hence, Humpty-Dumptyism is not tenable even in works directed at the author's present self, and therefore does not obtain in games (at least not for *this* reason), because there is a limit to what we can intend ourselves to understand by engaging with a work. This shows that a player's intentions can be fallible and that the gameplay cannot convey any conceivable meaning.

3.3.2 Reasonably inferable intentions

However, whether EAI is still a fruitful mode of interpretation is a different matter, and if it is not it becomes irrelevant whether players are authors, since their intentions would not matter either way. There are problems with EAI that could undermine it, and it is questionable whether these problems are obviated in games. For instance, the requirement that an author must expect her readers to

grasp her intentions places too high an emphasis on the artist's own expectations. It would follow that an author who writes a perfectly comprehensible novel produces nothing meaningful if she doubts the reader's capacity to understand it, irrespective of how well it conforms to conventional meaning.⁵⁰ In that case, an author writing in impeccable French for a unilingual English-speaker would not produce a meaningful work only because she lacks the required intention. Likewise, a player with doubts about what a potential spectator could grasp could play in such a way that everyone would fully understand the story, but it would nonetheless be meaningless only because she doubts anyone will understand it. It also follows that a text could vacillate between being meaningful and meaningless as the author vacillates between convictions. By accepting Stock's and Irwin's criterion of necessary belief on the creator's part we get what could be labelled as 'inverse Humpty-Dumptyism', i.e. an act of *depriving* an intelligible narrative of its obvious meaning only because of the artist's lack of intentions.

Conversely, it also means that a highly irrational person can endow a work with any meaning if she believes others will grasp it. If the author is irrational Irwin contends that the meaning still obtains whereas Stock dismisses it, and their respective solutions are both problematic. If we agree with Irwin we get Humpty-Dumptyism, and that would undermine all interpretative practices, since any content could convey practically anything. Stock limits herself to rational agents (2017, p.44n31), but this runs the risk of creating a circular definition: a rational agent is someone whose intentions can be grasped by others, and they can be grasped by others because she is a rational agent. Perhaps we can ignore such cases, if only for the sake of discussion, and assume that most authors and players are sane. The problem of irrational agents and their intentions still persists

⁵⁰ Cain Todd similarly argues that fictional truth should not be limited by the author's beliefs about the reader (2009, pp.199-200).

and does pose a serious challenge that makes EAI lead to Humpty-Dumptyism and could make video game stories arbitrary, but irrational agents are nevertheless not representative of authors in general.

Another problem relates to what it means for an intention to be reasonably inferable. In the case of *Resident Evil 4*, Stock and Irwin would probably hold that a sane player could only will but not intend it to have the story of *The Godfather*. This, however, looks circular. A person only intends p to mean x if it can be reasonably inferred, and the reason it can be reasonably inferred is that the person intends p to mean x . Further, whenever a person supposedly fails to convey her intentions, Stock claims that she did not really intend it, but Stock begs the question by assuming that if one fails to convey x one did not intend x for the reason that one does not intend what one fails to convey.

This definition is too biased in the author's favour, and would make authorial intentions infallible: authors could intend to convey anything they want, because if they fail to convey a given proposition, they merely *wanted* to convey it without intending it. When applied to video games, the principle only further undermines the significance of attributing the player with an authorial role. Suppose a player of *Ocarina of Time* intends young Link's green clothes to be pink. Since there is nothing in the game indicating that they are pink, both Stock and Irwin would probably claim that since she cannot convey this, she cannot *intend* the clothes to be pink. However, if one maintains that work-meaning is determined by genuine authorial intentions it places a strict limit on what can effectively be intended by the players, since games restrict what players can do. It is still viable to claim that the player is the author and that she can successfully realize all of her intentions, but only because a significant number of intentions are 'renounced', labelled as impossible to possess. If we instead reject the player as author in favour of the game designer we retain the same principle to the same extent (all intentions can

be realized because if not, they are not genuine intentions), but the quantity of intentions that can be realized is increased considerably. A player can only intend young Link's clothes to be green, but the designer can intend them to be of any colour she can programme them to be; the player's intentions are limited to content that is ultimately included in the game, the designer's intentions are limited by what *could* be included.

However, if fictional truth is defined by authorial intentions, it means that a proposition obtains only if the author intended it; this seems to be implied by Stock's explanation of how no intentions specify whether Hamlet has an Oedipus complex, and that this matter is therefore indeterminate (2017, p.103). A reader may still *imagine* things not specified by the author's intentions, Stock explains, but it is not part of the fictional content. This suggests that authorial intentions are necessary for fictional truth to the extent that no proposition acquires a determinate truth-value unless intended by the author, but Stock does not realize that this would make EAI untenable in all media. In literature, it would mean that Fleming could write that Blofeld poisons Bond's Martini and that Bond drinks said Martini, but it would not follow that Bond drinks poison unless Fleming intended it; it could be that Fleming only intended the first two propositions, but for whatever reason (forgetfulness, incompetence) did not intend their consequence, resulting in a paradox. Likewise, in *Ocarina of Time*, the mysterious person Sheik turns out to be princess Zelda in disguise. The player may then intend Link to talk to Sheik, and intend Sheik to be Zelda, without it following that Link talks to Zelda (unless the player intended this as well).

Stock indirectly attempts to solve such conundrums when she argues that a given belief can entail inferences when related to other beliefs, so that a person who believes that a given lake contains water and that water contains oxygen will also believe that the given lake contains oxygen, even though the person may be

unaware of this belief (2017, p.20). Regardless, this reveals nothing about whether the third belief following from the first two is held or not; like Stock says, the person may be unaware of this belief, but she may also be unaware that she does *not* have it, which could instead lead to a revision of one of the premises when the ineluctable conclusion is discovered (e.g. saying that not *all* water contains oxygen). Further, this argument of Stock's may contradict her later assertion that 'co-referring terms cannot be freely substituted into their content without a change in the nature of the intention' (2017, p.103).⁵¹ Her example is that if an agent intends to kick an object that unbeknownst to her is a Stradivarius, it does not follow that the agent intended to kick a Stradivarius. This example is in principle identical to mine. If the game would have allowed the player to kill Zelda/Sheik it could have entailed the paradox that the player can intend to kill Sheik but not Zelda, so the same character will be dead and alive at the same time! Furthermore, Currie has argued that one usually does not imagine all consequences following from the content of our make-believe, and even if one should try it would not be possible, since infinitely many consequences follow from non-tautological propositions (1995a, p.177). Stock overlooks this consequence, but Currie's argument has the added advantage that it is also more reconcilable with Stock's own emphasis on fictional content being what the interpreter is intended to imagine; an author probably does not intend us to imagine every consequence of all propositions in the narrative, only currently relevant ones. This is also more in line with what Stock says later, when she is at pains to refute the concept of automatically and unintentionally generated fictional truths (2017, pp.71-4). A better reply from intentionalists would be that the paradox cannot be reasonably inferred, because no one would draw the conclusion that Zelda is alive and Sheik is dead, and therefore the player cannot intend it. However, that does

⁵¹ Beardsley agrees (1992, pp.27-8).

not really solve the problem. The inability to intend the negation of a proposition does not necessitate intending the affirmation of its converse; the player may be unable to intend that Zelda does not die when Sheik does, but it does not follow that the player is therefore compelled to intend that Zelda *survives*.

In an audiovisual medium the problem is aggravated: unless the director intends everything in the image to be part of a film it follows that some of the content, although visible, does not exist in the story and should be disregarded by the audience. In games, this problem is exacerbated because of two kinds of content (hinted at above) for which EAI cannot account: content the player *did not intend* to include, and content she intended *not to include*. A player completing *Resident Evil 4* does not intend each character and object to occupy such-and-such location, and she certainly does not intend any of the content in cut-scenes. It has been argued that if the author lacks intentions on a particular matter the story is indeterminate on that point (Livingston 2005, p.199), but if the player lacks intentions on these matters it follows that most of what happens in the game – apart from the protagonist’s actions – is indeterminate, since the player has no intentions on these matters. It could be countered that players, once they see what is onscreen, form the intention to include the content (so the content still ends up in the story), but this *ad hoc* argument raises the question of why we should still see players as authors when their intentions have a minimal impact in relation to those of the designer (and seem to *follow* from them, making the players’ intentions a redundant addition to those of the designer). It could also be argued that the player cannot even *have* intentions about other things than her own avatar, since she does not think it is possible for her to control other factors apart from her own playable character. The designer, on the other hand, *can* intend things to behave in a certain way since she programmed them to, so it is clearly the designer who has authority in this case.

Another aspect of this problem is that a player cannot merely want everything she does, she needs to intend every single event to be part of the story.⁵² Irwin mentions the example of a basketball player taking a last-second shot, where a player who perfunctorily throws the ball does not really intend to score if she thinks it impossible, even if the shot is successful (2015, pp.144-5). In games the same phenomenon is probably common. The sheer difficulty could make a player doubt that she could possibly win, even if she eventually does. In that case the player did not intend to win but merely wanted it, but if intention is necessary for a proposition to be true in the story, it follows that it is not true in the story that the hero won. Likewise, a player who does not care for the story may have no intentions as to what is true within it, but it seems counter-intuitive that a complete and comprehensible narrative is meaningless only because the creator lacked the necessary intention at the time of creation.

Also, much of the content is actively *not* intended by the player, such as failure. The actual intentionalist could argue that failure is not part of the story, so the hero never gets hurt or dies, but players may actually intend to lose for possible strategic advantages in terms of gameplay: if you die too often in *Max Payne 3* and in *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) you receive a healing item. When watching the gameplay it can be hard to ascertain whether the player is taking damage because of ineptness or for strategic reasons, but if the game designer is the author we get the more consistent reading that taking damage is always at variance with the intended interpretation; the designer intends the player to get past the given section, and she further cements that taking damage works

⁵² Carroll argues that focusing on intentions is too narrow, and that meaning is 'determined by relevant elements [of] the mental stock of the artist' (2011, p.122). However, assessing what belongs to the set of relevant elements may be an even bigger endeavour than the interpretation itself, and would arguably undermine the distinction between what the artist intended to be a part of the story and what she only considered.

against that intention by, for instance, providing the player with a healing item to counteract a severe loss of health-points. Moreover, a player who gets hurt on purpose is most likely concerned primarily with the *ludologic* dimension and not the *narratological* one – you take damage as a means of improving your strategic advantage, not to create a better story – so by seeing the designer as author we get the added bonus of aesthetically superior stories (if only because they are more consistent in how taking damage is always negative). Thus, this version of EAI, though still flawed, is considerably less problematic if we see the *designer* and not the *player* as the author of the game story.

3.3.3 Retroactive alteration of meaning

Another problem stems from which intentions that are thought of as definitive. Stock says that intentions could change before or whilst being executed, but that intentions regarding the final version determine fictional content (2017, p.16). In a related vein Irwin says that an author cannot will something about the fiction when it is finished (2015, p.145). When pushed to the limit, this principle becomes absurd and introduces questions of which intentions matter and in what relation they stand to the finished work, perhaps leading to Humpty-Dumptyism. If we found out that J.K. Rowling's *initial* intentions were to write a fantasy-story, but the moment before writing the last full stop she changed her mind and intended it to be a science fiction story, deeming everything she had written to be sufficiently compatible with these new intentions (so she does not merely will it, but fulfils Stock's and Irwin's criterion of genuine expectations required for intentions), we would be obliged to accept that hundreds of pages written with the intention to be fantasy change meaning only because the author changes her mind, and that people who read them before Rowling's change of mind have to interpret them differently when reading them again. One could solve this by saying that the work

as a whole changes, so when Rowling reads her first draft (*sans* final full stop) she was in fact interpreting a *different* work, not the science fiction-story it would end up as. This would be a valid explanation, but it nevertheless remains counter-intuitive that hundreds of pages could change their meaning so easily.

The same principle applies to games. A player of *Snake Eater* could intend to kill all guards throughout the game and successfully do so up until the last minute of the game when she changes her mind and retroactively intends it to be a non-lethal playthrough with no kills. Naturally we would not want fictional truth to depend on sudden whims of capricious creators. Here intentionalists could argue yet again that said person could will but not intend this, but as already argued above it is question-begging to say that *p* was intended because it can be grasped, and if not it was never intended to begin with.

Intentionalists could insist on their case, claiming that the second-order intention of changing the first-order intention pertaining to fictional content does not obtain; Rowling did not *really* intend to change her intentions from writing fantasy to writing science fiction, she merely *willed* it, but without the required second-order intentions the first-order intentions will not change. Likewise, the player of *Snake Eater* only wanted to change her intentions without intending it. If the player merely *wills* to intend it, it must mean that we are not able to grasp this second-order intention, because if we would have been able to grasp it she would have successfully intended it.

This does not necessarily solve the problem; we could create an infinite regress of *n*-order intentions, introducing orders of intentions *ad infinitum* until we find an intention that is successfully realized and, by consequence, allows the other intentions to be realized as well. Thus, if the first-order intention fails we can still claim that she *intended* to intend, but if readers *can* grasp the second-order intention of changing the first-order intention they automatically grasp the first-

order intention too (since it is a constituent of the second-order intention), and if we grasp the first-order intention it means that it too was successfully conveyed and therefore realized. Intentionalists could turn this argument on itself by adding yet another tier: for every n number of intentions we introduce, intentionalists construct a chain with $n+1$ tiers where the last tier is occupied by volition and not intention. This would be a valid objection on their part, but we could counter with a chain containing $n+2$ tiers *ad infinitum*, ultimately ending up in a stalemate.⁵³

We could grant that an infinite chain of n -order intentions renders interpretation unnecessarily obtuse, and concede that one cannot intend to modify intentions in such a whimsical fashion, but the cogency of the intentionalist's argument comes at the price of the author's ability to change her mind with regard to her creation. It ultimately means that intentionalists cannot maintain that it is the intentions regarding the final version that obtain, since the author's early intentions to such a high extent limit what can be intended afterwards, depending on what intentions can be grasped through the current state of the book. The intentionalist may say that only the first intentions were *genuine* intentions, the following ones were only matters of *volition*, but that would aggravate epistemic problems by precluding appeals to the author's (purported) intentions regarding the final version of the work. Likewise, we cannot appeal to the player's purported intentions at the end of the playthrough, because these may be no more than mere volition, meaning that the player herself does not successfully separate what she intends and wants respectively.

It could also be that the author wavers between various intentions concerning the meaning, even if her intentions concerning which string of words to include remains consistent, but then it follows that the intentions that happen to be

⁵³ A similar problem pertaining to how first- and second-order intentions may lead to a regress is noted by Dickie and Wilson (1995, p.238).

graspable by virtue of being conveyed through that exact string of words will be the ones that obtain, regardless of when they were held during the process of creation. To illustrate this with an example: suppose that when writing the first Harry Potter-book, Rowling intended to write the line of dialogue 'You're a wizard, Harry'. However, not having fully decided on Harry's character, she has numerous thoughts on what this string of words is supposed to convey, first intending it to mean 'You're a woman, Harry', then 'You're an unemployed accountant from Exeter, Harry' etc. Intention number 27 may have been that Harry is a wizard, but this intention is soon replaced by other intentions, all equally incompatible with the conventional linguistic meaning of said string of words. Then Stock and Irwin would have to assert that it is intention number 27 that obtains and that other purported intentions are only examples of volition, since they cannot reasonably be inferred. However, from that it follows that the intention which obtains is the one best supported by the text and linguistic conventions, regardless of when during the writing it appears, raising the question of why we should devote so much attention to finding out intentions at all.

In games this problem is even more pertinent as oscillation between intentions is more prevalent, seeing how players often alter and/or fail to realize their intentions. A player is constantly modifying and updating strategies during a playthrough as a response to unforeseen events and outcomes of her actions, but it is not necessarily the last intention held that will correspond to what happened on-screen up until then, it could be the penultimate one, or the one at the start of the game etc. A player could successfully realize some instrumental intention in a session that ultimately fails, and then fail to recreate those instrumental intentions in the next session but successfully realize the ultimate of winning the game instead. As an example, a player of *Snake Eater* could intend to not kill any guards, but as she is about to win she accidentally dies herself. In the next session

she has to kill several guards because of her less skillful gameplay, but she wins the game. Then the last attempt would make it fictionally true that the protagonist Snake kills several guards, even though the player did not initially intend this (this kind of repetition and revision of the game story is not even possible in games that save player progress automatically, rendering player intentions even less pertinent).

It has been argued, however, that if an author changes her intention it does not mean that the result is a failed attempt at realizing the first (provisional) intention, but a successful attempt at realizing the second one (Huddleston 2012, p.246n15). Therefore, the intentionalist could argue that the player of *Snake Eater* does not fail to complete the game without killing anyone, for this is no longer her intention by the end of the game; instead she *succeeds* in completing the game by killing *n* number of guards. This is not a satisfactory solution for intentionalists considering players as authors. Not only does this explanation seem to be invoked primarily for the purpose of saving the conception of the player as author, it also renders the player's intentions infallible, as she can always add that the last intention, no matter how different from the initial one, was successfully conveyed, and we would hardly believe that a player who just died in *Snake Eater* changed her intention at the last moment before Snake's death. A game designer could also change her intentions in a similar fashion, but it is possible for her to change the code in the same way that an author can rewrite her book (or a director re-edit her film), so if we instead see the game designer as author we can at least reduce problems arising from indecision and retain the notion of authorial intentions as fallible.

This relates to the question of when a work finished. It has been argued that it is the artist who determines this (Livingston 2008, p.394; Livingston and Archer 2010, p.443; Livingston and Trogon 2014, p.227, 2015, pp.460-2; Killin 2015,

p.335).⁵⁴ If the player is the author, and the author decides when the work is complete, it follows that any game can end after five minutes with the accidental death of the protagonist as long as the player sincerely intends this. Some scholars presented earlier seem to accept this when they consider player death as a potential end of the story. However, not only would this produce a vast number of aesthetically inferior stories, it is also counter-intuitive that we should accept that the story is over when there are many potential tasks left to complete. If a novel/film does not end because the reader/spectator stops reading/watching when there are still some pages/images left to read/see, it seems inconsistent that we should grant that the game story is over when the player no longer wishes to play.

3.3.4 Using unrealized intentions as evidence

Moreover, it is debatable whether the player's intentions could still be inferred if they are not realized. If a player intends to finish *Snake Eater* without killing any guards but accidentally kills all of them in the process, we could not access the *initial* intention. Stock attempts to answer such objections by saying that in a chain of intentions it is not necessary that all of them be realized (2017, p.85). She presents the example of a person who successfully raises his arm and throws a dart, making those actions intentional, but fails to realize the intention of hitting the target. This does not mean that the ultimate intention will be completely hidden, Stock explains, because the instrumental intention can nevertheless indicate what the person attempted. Another example of hers is of someone who attempts to bake a cake but ends up making a mess which nevertheless allows anyone who sees the cake to infer what the original intention was; likewise, an author's actions will constitute sufficient evidence for readers to work out the original intention

⁵⁴ For more on artwork completion, see Hick (2008) and Gover (2015).

(Stock 2017, pp.88-9).⁵⁵ This line of reasoning only ostensibly solves the problem of the player's intentions in video games. One could claim that just as we can work out an author's failed intentions, we could conclude that a player who, for instance, kills a guard in *Snake Eater* did not intend this, meaning that it is not true in the story of *Snake Eater* that Snake kills a guard, even if it ended up in the representation. However, that seems to presuppose an evaluation of intentions that will always work in the favour of EAI, where realized intentions are given more attention than unrealized ones, so that our assessment of which intentions that provide us with an understanding of the work will always be biased so as to grant that the author's ultimate intentions are invariably realized. I see two significant problems with this.

Firstly, it may presuppose that we already know the ultimate intention before interpreting it, because otherwise we would not know which instrumental intentions are the most relevant for the ultimate intention, making the process circular. To illustrate this with a concrete example: towards the end of *300* (Snyder, 2007) the Spartan leader Leonidas (Gerard Butler) throws a spear towards the Persian emperor Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro), but misses. It is intuitive to assume that Leonidas intended to hit Xerxes, but that Gerard Butler intended to miss.⁵⁶ This means that the very same act conveys two diametrically opposed intentions regarding the ultimate goal of the spear-throw, but that raises the question of how we ascertain the intentions of Leonidas and Butler respectively. Selecting which parts of the chain of instrumental intentions that matter the most presupposes knowledge of the ultimate goal, it does not necessarily *lead* to it.⁵⁷ We know that the Spartan leader has the ultimate intention of killing Xerxes, and so we ascribe a

⁵⁵ Similar points about how works provide evidence of failed intentions have been raised by Carroll (1992, p.100) and Lintott (2002, p.70).

⁵⁶ Assuming for the sake of argument that the actor actually threw a spear.

⁵⁷ Lamarque makes a similar observation (1990, p.341).

higher value to the instrumental intention of throwing the spear than to the fact that it misses. Conversely, when we evaluate the spear throw of Butler we incorporate the miss into our evaluation and deem that the ultimate intention of missing was successful. *Pace* Stock, in this example we do not conclude what the ultimate intention was by studying the instrumental intentions, because our evaluation of Leonidas' and Butler's respective ultimate intentions presupposes that we already know which instrumental ones are more important to our comprehension. In literature this may not be a prevalent problem, seeing how authors can rewrite passages, but in games failure is ubiquitous and harder to rectify, rendering interpretation unnecessarily complex if the player is seen as author. If we instead see the game designer as author we still retain the more fundamental problem of knowing which intentions to ascribe a higher importance to (just as in literature and cinema), but at least this problem will not be as prevalent as when the *player* is regarded as author.

The second problem with allowing intentions to be conveyed by 'failed' artworks is that Stock overestimates the possibility of inferring intentions from unsuccessful realizations thereof, and makes the success-condition so minimal we yet again risk ending up with Humpty-Dumptyism and infallible intentions. Stock says that *something* must convey the intentions, but grants that even a failed attempt can suffice to do this.⁵⁸ This does not hold. Stock merely argues that authors can fail in terms of instrumental intentions, but maintains that ultimate intentions will be conveyed nevertheless, although differently, meaning that no author can ever truly fail to convey her intentions. This makes the success-condition as minimal as that presented by Maes, where practically anything counts as evidence, making any intention reasonably inferable. Likewise, a game can then mean whatever the player intends, any gameplay will count as evidence of

⁵⁸ Carroll also says this (1992, p.100).

the player's intention. One wonders whether this is really reconcilable with Stock's and Irwin's conceptions of embodied intentions. Recall: if an intention is not conveyed properly, Stock and Irwin say that it was not intended to begin with. Thus, Stock seems to say that whatever is manifest will count as evidence of intention, meaning that there cannot even *be* a case where the reader is unable to grasp the intention, because regardless of what the author writes this will be sufficient for a potential reader to grasp the original intentions. The only intentions that can fail are thus instrumental, not ultimate ones. This is merely a refined version of Humpty-Dumptyism.

A paradoxical consequence of this is that the paucity of evidence for intending to convey *p* could *in itself* be the evidence that the author intended to convey *p* (because everything in the work necessarily conveys ultimate intentions), so the work will mean *p* either by virtue of the text conveying this, or because it does *not* convey this. Stock cannot say that the author fails to convey any intention, because his goal was to convey *p*, and the text conveys *p through a failure to communicate p*. If both successful and unsuccessful conveyance are sufficient for the work to mean *p*, authorial intentions become infallible.

Even if we accept appeals to instrumental intentions one would have to answer to what extent intentions can change actual matter of facts, if Stock wants to avoid making her position redolent of Maes's when he makes work-meaning equivalent to authorial intentions even when these are not successfully communicated (a consequence Stock tries to avoid). Suppose someone intended to make brownies and accidentally made a sponge cake instead, but that it was still possible for anyone to reasonably infer what her intentions were. No one would then conclude that the cake she ended up making was actually a brownie, in spite of the evidence that she intended to bake one.⁵⁹ Likewise, if she intended

⁵⁹ Dickie and Wilson similarly argue that although we may recognize what a

to play *Devil May Cry* (Capcom, 2001) impeccably without taking damage even once, few would accept her intended version irrespective of how poorly the gameplay conforms to these intentions. If one does not think a sponge cake could be brownies in disguise, one cannot claim that a failed playthrough conveys the content of a successful one. Currie asserts that by studying private documents in search for authorial intentions one actually interprets *another* work, the one the author (unsuccessfully) *attempted* to create (2004, p.125), and the same principle applies to playthroughs when we try to comprehend what the player *attempted* to do without succeeding.

It is also dubious whether Stock's chain of intentions really solves anything. It would be convenient to divide actions into several steps, but that sidesteps the issue of whether an overarching intention can truly be realized if not all of the 'sub-intentions' of which it consists are realized as well. Let us use Stock's own example: 'Very often, agents intend to pursue their goals, both ultimate and instrumental. So: just as practical reasons may nest—an agent may do *C* in order to bring about *B*, and *B* in order to bring about *A* (and so on)—so too intentions may nest. An agent may intend to *C* in order to *B* in order to *A* (and so on)' (2017, p.16). She further adds that if a person intends to *A*, then the intention to *B* can be imputed as well if it is reasonable that said person intends to *A* and he considers *B* to be a good means of *A*-ing; one intention can thus act as partial evidence of another. This argument is problematic for several reasons.

Firstly, it has been argued that requiring intentions for each intermediary step before the ultimate intention leads to a regress of 'preintentions' (Sellors 2007, p.269). From this it follows that regardless of which link in the chain of preintentions is not realized, the intentionalist could introduce a successfully

person *intended* to say, we can still maintain that she did not actually say it (1995, p.237).

realized preintention preceding the failed one and argue that this realized preintention is sufficient evidence as to what the ultimate intention was.

Secondly, by creating chains of intentions we get a dilemma where the first horn is that if intentionalists appeal to parts of a chain of instrumental intentions in their evaluation, it follows that if so much as one of these fails, the author fails to realize her intentions, since she did not intend to convey p with a chain containing failed instrumental intentions. The second horn is that the intentionalist can disregard chains of instrumental intentions and allow for the ultimate intention to be realized nonetheless, with the consequence that the artist's ultimate intention *cannot* be inferred only with reference to the instrumental ones, since these are ignored (and it would be *ad hoc* to ignore only the unrealized instrumental intentions; doing so would also be question-begging for the reason explained above, that we would have to know the ultimate intention in order to know which instrumental intentions to ignore). From this it follows that if the ultimate intention is *not* realized we cannot appeal to instrumental intentions as a means of inferring what the ultimate (unrealized) intention was.

The more fundamental problem in Stock's line of reason is that although she is aware that intentions may nest, she seems to neglect their interdependence. There is a fundamental difference between an agent with the three separate intentions to A , B , and C , and one with a *single* intention of A -ing through B -ing by means of C -ing, where the realization of this larger intention depends on the successful realization of each and every step that constitutes it; whenever each step depends on the preceding one a second-order 'meta-intention' cannot be realized unless each step is. Thus, if a person does *not* intend to A , B , and C , but rather intends to A in order to B in order to C , and fails to A (which precludes B and C), she cannot be said to have conveyed her intention. In games this is quite prevalent, as most of them require chains of intentions making

up a larger 'meta-intention'. In *Ocarina of Time*, players may intend to complete a large number of tasks and defeat certain enemies in a determined order before they can finally defeat the main villain Ganondorf, and if one of these steps should fail they cannot reach the final one. Many players inevitably fail to realize some of these sub-intentions due to lack of skills or loss of interest, but failing to realize an early sub-intention prevents realizing later sub-intentions, which gives little indication as to what they intended for the remainder of the story. Suppose *Ocarina of Time* consists of 100 small tasks, but a given player only performs the first one; we would then be unable to infer intentions pertaining to the remaining 99 tasks, which leaves Stock two options. The first is to claim that the player willed the subsequent 99 steps but only intended the first one, as only that one can be inferred. However, Stock also says that no text produced by a rational agent contains *no* evidence of her intentions (2017, p.91), so Stock's second option is to claim that the first step is sufficient evidence for the remaining 99, but this renders the success-condition too small, leading to Humpty-Dumptyism. If we instead see the *designer* as author this problem is reduced dramatically, as different parts in the chain of intentions do not depend on each other in the same way. Even if a player does not realize the first intention, which is necessary for realizing the remaining 99, the designer could still have realized her intention of writing the code for all 100 steps; the fact that the player does not always access these intentions is no different from a reader/spectator who does not grasp all the intentions of an author/director.

Hence, EAI suffers from inherent flaws that make it an untenable mode of interpretation in general and in video games in particular. It ascribes too high an importance to the beliefs of the author, allowing for meaningless narratives to *acquire* meaning and meaningful ones to *lose* it only by virtue of the author's belief. If one allows for narrative content to restrict what could be intended, it

makes players less viable candidates for authors insofar as their intentions are restricted by what the designer included in the game, and since they possess intentions pertaining only to a small amount of the game's content. Furthermore, games actively work against the realization of the players' intentions, forcing them to incessantly alter these. This fact also risks either preventing a majority of intentions from being realized, or making success-conditions so small that they are *always* realized (resulting in Humpty-Dumptyism). Should one nevertheless insist on endorsing EAI, its issues are alleviated if one regards the *designer* as the author.

3.4 Moderate actual intentionalism

Having dealt with EAI, we can move to moderate actual intentionalism.⁶⁰ The essential difference between EAI and MAI is that the latter sees artistic intentions as determinant of work-meaning only insofar as these intentions are compatible with the linguistic meaning of the work; if word-meaning and authorial intentions diverge, authorial intentions do not change the meaning of the words. When linguistic and/or literary conventions make *several* meanings compatible with the same string of words, the author's intentions determine which of these is correct. In brief, authorial intentions are only authoritative insofar as they are supported by the work (Iseminger 1996, pp.320-1; Livingston 1998, p.835; Carroll 2000, pp.76-7, 2002, p.323, 2011 p.119; Trivedi 2001, pp.196-7, 2015, p.700; Lintott 2002, pp.66-7; Irvin 2006, pp.118-19; S. Davies 2006, pp.227-8; Mikkonen 2009; Gover 2012, p.170). In contrast to EAI, MAI allows for a work to have meaning beyond artistic intentions (Livingston 1993, p.107, 2003, p.284, 2005, p.142; Trivedi 2001, p.196; Lintott 2002, p.68; S. Davies 2006, p.234, p.238; Stecker and Davies 2010,

⁶⁰ Sometimes referred to as 'modest actual intentionalism' or 'partial actual intentionalism'. Whenever criticism and/or defense applies equally to EAI and MAI I refer to both as 'intentionalism'.

pp.309-11). If artistic intentions are not supported by the word-sequence, adherents of MAI either claim that the given sequence is meaningless, or that it acquires the conventional linguistic meaning (Iseminger 1996, p.322; Irvin 2006, pp.118-19; S. Davies 2006, p.228; Stecker 2003, p.42, 2006, p.429; Sellors 2007, p.265; Carroll 2011, p.131). As for visual media, the image acquires the meaning intended by the artist only insofar as this meaning can be ascertained by a sensitive and informed viewer (Carroll 2011, p.120).

What it means for an artist to successfully convey her intentions is debatable. One view says that the artistic intention is realized when the work conveys a meaning that an appropriate reader is most likely to grasp; another is that the intention is realized as long as it is compatible with the work-meaning, but not necessarily the only possible (or most plausible) interpretation, (S. Davies 2006, p.228; Carroll 2011 pp.119-20). Moderate intentionalists' lack of clarity on this matter has been criticized (D. Davies 2007, p.193n32; Maes 2008, pp.87-8). However, some defenders of MAI have argued that mere *compatibility* with work-meaning is not enough for an intention to obtain, the intention must be *relevant*, so as not to become an extraneous addition with no bearing on the text (Lintott 2002, p.71; Livingston 2005, p.155, p.199; S. Davies 2006, pp.229-30; Stecker 2008, p.40).

Another theory, presented by Robert Stecker, is that work-meaning is not defined by linguistic conventions alone, the relevant context can allow for a non-conventional meaning insofar as it provides evidence that permits the author to convey her intention (2006, p.431). This does not apply only to linguistic artworks, because nonliterary artworks, though not literal utterances, are nevertheless *analogous* to utterances, from which it follows that work-meaning is in some sense analogous to utterance meaning (Stecker 2006, p.430). Similar observations have been made by Livingston (2005, pp.148-9) and Currie (1995b, p.28n12).

As mentioned in the previous section, intentionalism has been criticized since it seems to lead interpreters away from the text and compels them to look for the artist's intentions elsewhere. However, moderate intentionalists maintain that extratextual sources such as journals and interviews can be used if they improve our understanding of the artist's intentions, provided that they are supported by the work (Carroll 2000, p.83). MAI thus avoids the dilemma of making authorial intentions infallible, because if an author intended to write 'black' but wrote 'green', according to MAI the text does not mean 'black' only because the author intended it to (Carroll 2000, p.85; Gover 2012, p.170, pp.175-6).

MAI has been criticized since it introduces problems absent in EAI. One common criticism is that if intentions only determine work-meaning insofar as these are compatible, it would seem as if intentions are superfluous. We then have to identify *both* work-meaning *and* artistic intentions independently before we can determine whether they match, but if we can identify work-meaning without knowing the intentions it raises the question of why we should bother with grasping the intentions to begin with; if work-meaning and intentions *cannot* be separated we have no way of knowing whether the intentions were successfully conveyed (Trivedi 2001, p.198, 2015, pp.700-2; Kiefer 2005, p.272; Livingston 2005, p.146; Stecker 2005, p.154, 2006, p.432, 2008, p.43; D. Davies 2007, p.72; Levinson 2010, pp.145-6). If the intentions are not realized they become equally superfluous, as intentions alone are not sufficient to endow the work with a meaning it does not support (Livingston 2005, p.146). Briefly, the dilemma thus has two horns: either artistic intentions become superfluous – since we can know work-meaning without them – or we cannot assess how well the intentions fit with the meaning (Trivedi 2001, pp.198-9). Related to this is the dilemma that either the intentions were realized – in which case one need not refer to them, as the work conveys its meaning on its own – or they were *not* realized, meaning that claims

about work-meaning cannot refer to intentions, as intentions and work-meaning do not coincide (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954, pp.375-6; Livingston 1998, pp.831-2, 2003, p.283).

Moreover, if a given part of the artwork becomes meaningless when it cannot support the artist's intention, it follows that interpreters are prevented from appealing to linguistic conventions even in cases where a word does have an actual meaning (albeit not the one the artist had in mind) so they are *mistaken* if they believe it to be meaningful, even if there is no evidence to prove the contrary (Irvin 2006, p.119). Further, if the string of words supports more than one possible interpretation it raises two questions: why the *author* should decide which is correct, and why we could not allow for a work to be *ambiguous* (Beardsley 1992, p.31; Lyas 1992, p.147; Leddy 1999, p.228; D. Davies 2004, p.86, p.95; Irvin 2006, p.120; Trivedi 2015, p.721). Yet another criticism is that it would be more economical to categorically appeal to conventional or intentional meaning instead of the disjunctive solution of MAI, where both conventional *and* intentional meanings are applied alternatively (Irvin 2006, p.120; Irwin 2015, p.141; Stock 2017, p.14).

Stecker's answer to the dilemma of intentions either being superfluous or infallible is that both can be identified through a process of mutual adjustment; they determine one another, and our understanding of one may alter our understanding of the other (2005, p.155, 2006, p.432, 2008, p.43). Sheila Lintott argues in a similar fashion, saying that 'we approach the artwork with the idea in mind that the artist has been at least partially successful in realizing her semantic intentions in the work and that we try to understand the work accordingly' (2002, p.67). Intentions are not redundant since the search for meaning and intentions are not two separate endeavours (Lintott 2002, p.72). It has also been argued that if the artist presents intentions irreconcilable with the work, one might question her

honesty (Lintott 2002, p.71n14; Maes 2010, p.130). Lintott further adds that it is a false dichotomy to separate work-meaning and artistic intentions, since intentions *determine* work-meaning insofar as the latter supports the former (2002, p.68). In a related vein, Iseminger argues that work-meaning is a function of both the word-sequence *and* the utterer's meaning (1996, p.322). According to Lintott, if we cannot identify intentions it means either that they were not successfully realized or that the interpreter failed to identify and add a possible interpretation (2002, p.68). However, she emphasizes that although intentions may help the interpreter discover work-meaning, the latter must still support the former; intentions and work-meaning are not identical (Lintott, p.68n8).

Defenders of MAI have also criticized the binary conception of successful realizations of intentions. Lintott argues that it is a false dichotomy to offer only the two options of complete failure/success, and it is rather a matter of degree, with few artists completely succeeding or failing to express their intentions (2002, p.69). An artwork with no indication of the artist's intention is analogous to a completely failed conversation where what the speaker says gives no hints at what she intended to say (Lintott 2002, p.70). Similarly, Stecker argues that although an entire work can have a single utterance-meaning, each constituent of the work (e.g. sentences in a literary work) also has meaning which make up the larger meaning of the whole (2006, p.432).⁶¹ Further, Lintott adds, drawing upon Carroll, that evidence of failed intentions can still be found in a work (2002, p.70).⁶²

3.4.1 Advantages of MAI in video games

At a first glance MAI seems to be more in line with what game theorists say about the player's ability to influence the text, since several of them mention that the

⁶¹ For criticism of equating artworks with utterances, see Kiefer (2005, p.273-5).

⁶² Recall that Stock says the same.

player can only influence the game within parameters set by the designer. This sounds like what moderate actual intentionalists say about work-meaning, since they maintain that the text can mean only what is supported by conventions (e.g. linguistic ones), and in cases where authorial intentions deviate from the text's meaning, the latter has a higher authority. Moderate actual intentionalists display a laudable desire to salvage intentionalism from devastating criticism directed towards it without 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater', and it would indeed be a hasty decision to do away with actual intentionalism as a whole only because the most extreme version does not bear scrutiny. If artistic intent had been all that mattered, engagement with artworks would have been futile, since artists could provide more accurate and less ambiguous interpretations through other means. MAI retains the importance of the work, making it worthwhile and meaningful to engage with the artwork and not just the artist's journals and notes, without categorically rejecting authorial intentions.

Moreover, critics of MAI misconstrue one aspect of the alleged epistemic dilemma. As already mentioned above, one common criticism directed at MAI is that if we can know work-meaning independently of artistic intentions, the latter become superfluous. Saam Trivedi's conclusion is that knowledge of work-meaning renders intentions extraneous, but he may have misconstrued MAI, because one point frequently raised by intentionalists of all stripes is the dependence of meaning on artistic intentions. MAI does not renounce this principle entirely, it only presents a more moderate version of it. Trivedi's criticism is cogent, but only in cases where artistic intentions are not realized; it is only then that intentions have to make way for conventional meaning. However, if we know the intention *and* that it is not successfully expressed, defenders of MAI would concede that those intentions are irrelevant to the work-meaning, that is the very premise of their interpretive approach! Whenever the work does support artistic

intentions, MAI states that the meaning is *determined* by the artist's intention, and then Trivedi's criticism no longer holds. He speaks of work-meaning as if all works had but one possible and evident meaning, but most works are likely to have several, perhaps equally plausible ones, and then the moderate intentionalist may appeal to the author's intention to evaluate these meanings; we have to identify independent meanings and the author's intention so we can make the necessary comparison to see how well they fit, we cannot do away with either. The author's intentions may not be compatible with any of the possible work-meanings, but if they are, they are essential to identifying the correct interpretation; this means that intentions are not surplus, as some opponents believe.

Moreover, opponents of intentionalism have exaggerated their criticism of how this directs the interpreter's attention away from the work. Consultation of private documents does not contradict the claim that the work is the best evidence for the author's intention so long as one distinguishes between necessity and sufficiency, and acknowledges the extent to which a given source augments our understanding. Not even the best evidence is necessarily unambiguous and/or infallible, so a document such as an author's journal only acts as a 'second opinion', not a more reliable and preferable indicator of authorial intentions. This is something critics seem to neglect, and which defenders do not sufficiently elaborate upon; a work may be necessary but insufficient for full comprehension, and still contribute with more information than extratextual sources, thereby retaining its status as the best source of information.

There are other advantages with MAI and the importance it grants the role of conventions, so long as we grant that conventions need not be exclusively linguistic in nature. As mentioned in the previous section, Gover explains that film has conventions of similarity and representation (2012, p.180). Similarly, there are conventions unique to video games which arguably cannot be 'overruled' by player

intentions, meaning that when the intended and the conventional meaning diverge, the latter obtains. For instance, many (if not most) games clearly distinguish between when a player has successfully completed the game and when she has lost. The latter often entails some kind of game over-screen (reading, for instance, 'game over', 'you died', 'mission failed' etc.), but games that lack such texts nevertheless signal that the player did not successfully complete the task at hand and should try again: if you die in *Half-Life 2*, pressing any key will automatically reload the last save-game; when you reach the end, end-credits redolent of those from films start rolling. Similarly, *Max Payne* lacks a game over-screen, but confirms the player's victory at the end with a text-box with the message 'Congratulations! You have completed Max Payne.' If we grant that there can be nonlinguistic conventions in nonliterary media, then a game over-screen (or equivalent) conventionally means that the game is not finished and that the gameplay is not 'canonical', i.e. should be disregarded and has no bearing on fictional truth. This is a significant advantage for video game interpretation, because this acknowledges that intentions are fallible, and therefore cannot categorically override textual evidence, so we avoid Humpty-Dumptyism.

The fallibility of intentions is an essential matter in video games. In literary narratives, it is comparatively easy, from a practical perspective, to realize one's intentions: it is not harder to write one word than another (whether it conveys the author's intention is a separate matter). In film, a given intention can be conveyed with the appropriate image, even if technological and/or economical factors constrain the means by which those images are created. Games are a different matter. As explained in the previous section, the challenge of realizing an intention is an essential factor implemented to enrich the player's experience. If the player is an author, she is perhaps the only kind of author who works with a medium actively working *against* her intentions, since the game's puzzles, enemies,

challenges in timing etc. are programmed to *prevent* her from achieving her goal, and so there is arguably a *greater* necessity of allowing for intentions to be fallible in this medium. Note that this simultaneously resolves several *temporal* issues discussed in previous chapters: many games could not take place in the present since textual evidence contradicts this, irrespective of what the player may intend.

There are even more advantages with MAI applied to games. As mentioned by Lintott, success and failure should not be regarded in as binary a fashion as is often done by opponents of intentionalism, that would be a false dichotomy. In games, this is all the more pertinent as players are unlikely to realize all of their intentions.

3.4.2 Problems with MAI in video games

In spite of these advantages, there are several potential problems with MAI. First of all, depending on how one construes EAI and MAI respectively, there may be no essential differences between these interpretative schools and their respective results. EAI, which holds that authorial intentions categorically determine the meaning of a work (i.e. Humpty-Dumptyism), does indeed differ from MAI, but as already shown in the previous section, not all extreme intentionalists defend Humpty-Dumptyism anyway. This means that moderate intentionalists attack more of a 'straw man' than an actual interpretative school when they highlight the alleged strengths of MAI in relation to EAI.

Extreme intentionalists provide several strategies of how to avoid Humpty-Dumptyism, and these ultimately render EAI and MAI practically indistinguishable. As explained in the previous section, EAI can be salvaged partly by emphasizing the difference between *intention* and *volition*. Moderate intentionalist's failure to acknowledge these limitations of intentions has already been noted by Irwin (2015, pp.141-2). One can *want* 'black' to mean 'green', but one cannot *intend* it, meaning

that defenders of MAI may have taken unnecessary steps to resolve conflicts between work-meaning and intentions, a strategy based on a deficient understanding of the nature and inherent limits of intentions. From this it follows that, in practice, EAI and MAI will not yield different results in many cases. J.K. Rowling wrote that Harry Potter has green eyes, but if she actually meant that he had *blue* eyes, Stock and Irwin would reply that this does not make Harry's eyes blue, since Rowling could not have *intended* it. Defenders of MAI could argue that Rowling *did* intend it, but would nonetheless agree with Stock and Irwin that this does not change the fictional fact of which colour his eyes *really* are. Likewise, when playing *Ocarina of Time* a player may intend Link to wear a pink dress, and a moderate intentionalist would reply that textual evidence speaks against this (the game does not allow players to wear pink dresses) whereas an extreme intentionalist would say that the player could not intend this to begin with; both groups get the same result, that Link does *not* wear a pink dress.

Note that the primary difference is the conception of the nature of intentions, but that is a matter independent of truth in fiction. Cases in which MAI and EAI may get different results are extreme ones where someone does possess proper intentions to mean 'black' when saying 'green', or that Link wears a pink dress in spite of what we see on-screen. An extreme intentionalist like Irwin would argue that the work means whatever the irrational agent intends it to, since she fulfils the requirement of sincere belief, but MAI, placing a higher emphasis on linguistic conventions, would not grant that the work obtains a new meaning even when the author possesses sincere belief. Although such cases allow EAI and MAI to display their fundamental differences they are probably so rare that we can ignore them most of the time.

In brief, both EAI and MAI can avoid Humpty-Dumptyism, and though the strategies may differ, in many cases they may yield the same result. Since MAI

seems to be primarily concerned with avoiding Humpty-Dumptyism and problems derivative of it, one may ask why we should prefer it to EAI when the latter provides its own solution.

3.4.3 Success conditions

Another problem is how to construe the success condition required for an intention to obtain. One problem related to this is noted by Sherri Irvin: an intention entails a disposition towards a specific behaviour in the relevant circumstances, but if those circumstances do not obtain the intentions will, as a consequence, not be revealed (2006, p.117). To illustrate this with an example: if an author meant to write 'green' but instead wrote 'black', we may nonetheless expose this error if we were to ask her what objects possess this colour, and she were to answer 'grass and frogs, but not coal and pitch'. Here Irvin is primarily concerned with possibly idiosyncratic and undetectable intentions within a work, but she – and Beardsley (1992, p.29) – argue that in long works the possible misunderstandings will be few and marginal to the work-meaning. However, one could argue to the contrary.

To see why, let us consider possible solutions to this problem: it has been argued that it does not suffice for an intention to only be compatible with the text in the sense that it is consistent with it, it must also have some stronger relevance and reveal features that up until then had not been detected (Lintott 2002, p.71; Livingston 2005, p.155, p.199; S. Davies 2006, pp.229-30; Stecker 2008, p.40). This does not necessarily solve anything, because it could be argued that *any* intention invariably enriches the story somehow, which would make intentions infallible; all intentions enrich the story in some way, so all obtain. If we modify the demand and say that intentions have to be relevant to overarching themes and motifs, intentions that may be consistent with the work are nevertheless precluded if they are marginal and undetectable. Though we solve that small problem a much

larger one consequentially appears: by demanding that an intention be compatible with and *enrich* the text somehow, we get the awkward consequence that the more absurd an interpretation is, the higher the relevance for our interpretations.

To illustrate this: Livingston presents the example of an author of a realist novel who claims that his protagonist is a Martian, and thinks it is a 'daft interpretation' (Livingston 2005, p.155), whereas Maes argues that if this intention is sincere, it is likely to be of value (Maes 2010, p.130).⁶³ One could argue that *any* story would be enriched by claiming that the protagonist is a Martian, because it adds yet another element opening up for even more interpretations.⁶⁴ Maes also notes this consequence when he says that 'even the most extravagant hypothesis will prove revealing in this sense, if only enough effort is put into it' (2008, p.88). Some intentions would arguably be irrelevant, such as the exact number of hairs on Harry Potter's head, but the intention that Harry Potter be a vampire changes everything, and would add a new meaning to many passages (the fact that he spends most of his time in a castle would open up for parallels with Gothic vampire stories). Thus, we would not want intentions to obtain only because they are compatible with the text, or even because they enrich it. These factors are necessary but not sufficient, and further requirements need to be formulated, lest the moderate intentionalist unwittingly legitimize some kind of value maximization where extravagant intentions invariably obtain because they are relevant to the work-meaning somehow; it would allow players to postulate the most absurd things about the story they supposedly create, and a player who claims, for instance, that Super Mario is a vampire could obviate possible objections regarding incompatibility with the text by adding the caveat 'in disguise'. The fact

⁶³ See also Currie (1990, p.63) for a related point.

⁶⁴ Note that this is *not* a case of so-called 'value maximization', i.e. of claiming that a work of art 'is to be interpreted in ways that maximize its value as a work of literature' (S. Davies 2006:223-4); Livingston admits that the new interpretation need not be *better* (2005, p.155).

that Mario not only has a thirst for blood but also has to hide it from the public would arguably have an even bigger impact on the work-meaning. What criteria one should postulate in order to negate such intentions is outside the scope of this section, my point is simply that defenders of MAI need to further develop their theories in this area.

One thing can be noted though, with regard to what implications this has for video games. If we assume that the player intends Super Mario to be a vampire, no circumstances in the game might obtain where her behaviour reveals this intention, and since it is a sincere intention which enriches the story it fulfils the requirements postulated even if it remains undetectable. The game may even contain segments that provide circumstances which could *potentially* reveal her disposition to change her behaviour, but her play-style guarantees that these never obtain; if Super Mario is a vampire he would have to die if exposed to sunlight, but the player's awareness of this compels her to keep Mario in the shade. The game designer, however, has all the possibilities in the world to alter the code so as to convey her intentions about fictional truth. If Mario is a vampire, she could programme the game so that Mario dies in sunlight, can transform into a bat, has a thirst for blood etc. Just like a literary author or a cinematic director, her intentions may only be partially realized, but at least she can provide interpreters with more (reliable) information than a player. The general criticism against MAI still stands, but is attenuated if the designer is the author.

An important point related to this is how to treat sections where intentions are *not* realized. MAI has one obvious advantage in literary narratives, since it is possible for an author to produce a string of words that does not conform to linguistic norms at all, and in such cases we could state with certainty that the given sentence is meaningless. Since the string of words lacks semantic meaning it cannot be said to express anything, let alone the author's intention. Seeing how

audiovisual narratives – such as films and video games – do not depend on conventions to the same extent as linguistic ones, it may be less common for them to be completely void of meaning; as a consequence, they may contain more sequences with a meaning not compatible with the artist's intentions. Arguably, films and video games, so long as they present anything identifiable, cannot fail to convey *some* kind of meaning, albeit not the one intended by the artist; the audiovisual equivalent of a meaningless string of words would be a stream of images with no discernible content (perhaps because the image is too blurry and the sound too scrambled), but whereas an author can easily misspell a word, thus failing to produce a meaningful semantic unit, the majority of a player's failures consist in failing to produce the *intended* content, not failure to produce *any* content. This leads to an important question: how are we, in general, to interpret segments that convey meaning incompatible with the artist's intention?

There are two solutions on offer: either the segment is meaningless, or it acquires meaning supported by linguistic conventions (Iseminger 1996, p.322; Irvin 2006, pp.118-19; S. Davies 2006, p.228; Stecker 2003, p.42, 2006, p.429; D. Davies 2007, pp.79-80). The first version Irvin calls MAI1, the second MAI2. Both are problematic.

MAI1, stating that non-intended sections are in fact meaningless, has its advantages. A common criticism against MAI is that authorial intentions are either superfluous or infallible, but critics have failed to notice that this argument does not apply to this version of MAI, possibly since they fail to distinguish between conventional/linguistic meaning and work-meaning. First of all, intentions are not infallible, because MAI1 concedes that a given segment does not express authorial intentions if they are not compatible with the text's conventional meaning, which allows for an independent assessment of intentions and conventional meanings without presuming that either must be equated with work-meaning.

Secondly, MAI1 retains the importance of authorial intentions, since it is only by knowing these that we can know whether a given section is meaningful at all. Without them, we might erroneously take the conventional meaning to be the work-meaning. Thirdly, it does away with the problem of unintended meaning, which can be prevalent in audiovisual media like films and games. If the director did not intend us to see the boom-mic but it accidentally drops into the frame, or if the player did not intend her character to die, we can claim that since neither is intended, neither is part of the narrative, in spite of the textual evidence. In brief, in MAI1 authorial intentions are neither superfluous, nor infallible, and thus it avoids pressing issues noted by some of its opponents.

On the other hand, MAI1 has some issues. Firstly, it gives the awkward consequence that, in practice, interpreters will mistakenly ascribe meaning to a section that it actually does not support (with no evidence to indicate their interpretive error), since the section, unbeknownst to the readers, deviates from the author's intention (Irvin 2006, p.119). As inescapable as this consequence may be, in a novel and a film this is not necessarily a big problem in practice, if we agree with Lintott that success is a matter of degree, but even if we assume that most of an author's semantic intentions are realized we are still left with what Irvin calls 'strange islands of meaninglessness in the midst of works that appear to be meaningful' (2006, p.119). The author is probably sufficiently successful to minimize the number of such 'islands', although they remain an awkward and inevitable consequence. Irvin has objected to this, referring to moderate intentionalists' concession that meaning is fixed to some extent by conventions, but her criticism is somewhat misdirected. If we distinguish between linguistic meaning and work-meaning, then MAI1 does not renounce the role of conventions with regard to the former, only the latter; MAI1 does not seem to claim that the word 'black' lacks linguistic meaning, only that it lacks meaning *in the narrative*. If

Rowling meant to write that Harry Potter has black eyes, the sentence 'Harry Potter has green eyes' still conveys, linguistically, the colour of a certain person's eyes, but is meaningless in the narrative context as it does not correspond to Rowling's intentions. This means that MAI1 retains one problematic aspect of Humpty-Dumptyism, that meaning is too intimately connected to authorial intentions without necessarily being accessible to the interpreter. We could grant that Rowling's intention is partially realized insofar as the sentence successfully conveys that Harry's eyes have *some* colour, but we retain the issue of how the text lacks the meaning one would intuitively ascribe to it with nothing in the text allowing readers to realize this. MAI1 thus remains problematic, but not entirely for the reason Irvin thinks.⁶⁵

However, by applying this version of MAI to video games the problem is compounded, since most of a player's intentions are *not* realized, partly because she has no intentions on matters beyond her limited control, but also because gameplay is typically replete with failed attempts. A challenging game like *Dark Souls* could consist to a large extent of failed attempts of avoiding enemies and/or inflicting damage on them, and games in the *Zelda*-series abound with puzzles where players may spend much time trying to figure out the solution, with only a fraction of that time being devoted to actually *solving* the puzzle once the solution is found. This version of MAI would render the majority of such gameplay meaningless, equivalent to a book where most pages are covered with nonsense. Add to this the epistemic dilemma noted by Irvin (we may have no way of knowing that these passages fail to express the artist's intentions) and it becomes evident

⁶⁵ Carroll tries to answer related objections by saying that hypothetical intentionalism will produce *more* indeterminacy than MAI (2011, p.131); however, he does not explain why hypothetical intentionalism produces indeterminate meanings at all, let alone more than MAI. Furthermore, he neglects that according to MAI, we do not know which meanings are determinate (since we may not recognize when linguistic meaning and authorial intentions diverge).

that MAI1 becomes untenable in video games if the player is seen as the author. If we on the other hand regard the *designer* as the author the number of 'strange islands of meaninglessness' will be reduced significantly. The designer may still have overlooked parts of the code that do not convey her intentions, just as an author/director may have overlooked equivalent parts in a novel/film, but these will be substantially less than if the player is the author. The problem persists, but becomes more manageable.

MAI2 – where the work acquires the conventional linguistic meaning whenever the artist's intentions are not realized – is somewhat more complex than MAI1, and we have to address several aspects of it before we can see why this view is equally (if not more) problematic when regarding the player as author. One problem is that MAI2 either renders art interpretation meaningless, or renders intentions infallible. The reasons are as follows:

Authorial intentions may become infallible, since by permitting use of extra-textual documents, all intentions we can assess necessarily obtain insofar as they appear in said documents. Stecker explains that one can convey an intention irreconcilable with the conventional meaning of an utterance 'but only by supplying evidence for a hypothesis about what that intention is' (2006, p.431). One could argue that the author's private documents, if admissible when interpreting, supply such evidence. However, this means that the most absurd intentions can be conveyed by any work as long as they are outlined somewhere else. For instance, Fleming could have intended the James Bond-books be fantasy-stories about wizards and dragons, and this intention would be successfully conveyed by the books as long as we are allowed to use Fleming's private notes where this is clearly stated. Likewise, a player may imagine that Super Mario is a vampire, and as long as she provides a clear extra-textual source confirming this, her intention would obtain. Thus, any conceivable narrative can convey any meaning in virtue of

extra-textual evidence justifying the unconventional interpretation, and it is *this* that makes artistic intentions practically infallible, that the permissible extra-textual sources legitimize the very meaning they were supposed to only evaluate. This is close to Humpty-Dumptyism, in the sense that any conceivable fiction can convey any content the author wishes. This flaw of MAI seems to have been overlooked by advocates and critics alike.

A moderate actual intentionalist may add that extra-textual evidence alone is not sufficient evidence and that the text must be able to support this interpretation on its own, but that raises the question of how we may use private documents and to what extent. Firstly, it bears repeating that the work may in fact *not* be the best evidence, as already mentioned in the sections on EAI. Secondly, it has been argued that an author maybe does not intend readers to use extratextual sources such as private journals when interpreting the work (Nathan 1992, p.198, 2005, pp.39-40, 46; D. Davies 2007, p.84). However, if the author intends the work to be non-ambiguous *and* independent we have no way of knowing whether our interpretation is correct, which in itself should show that the artistic intention failed. The moderate intentionalist may reply that we may use the journal to *verify* our interpretation once we have read the work, which is essentially different from using it as a tool whilst interpreting it; Lintott says something like this (2002, p.68n8). Also, it has been argued that the author's intention is realized if a reader with knowledge of the intention considers it to be the best interpretation (D. Davies 2007, p.83), which could mean that the author's intention should not influence our interpretation, only illuminate its validity. However, we then return to the same problem once more: if the artist intended the work not to be ambiguous, but ambiguity is supported by the work, the moderate intentionalist would have to allow for the conventional meaning to obtain instead, making consultation of the artist's private journal pointless. Moreover, the artist may have intended us to use

biographical information but not made this clear in her journals, so the application of extra-textual documents is in itself an interpretative matter where artistic intentions may fail. Likewise, a player may intend to convey something through her gameplay without needing to explain it, which would make questions an illegitimate form of interpretation. Last but not least, intentionalists argue as if private documents were simple and elucidating means towards correct interpretations, neglecting that those documents in themselves have to be interpreted.⁶⁶ Fleming could have written in his diary that he thought of Bond as a vampire and remained silent on whether he intended to *convey* this in his books, a necessary requirement for the proposition to obtain, leaving some passages more ambiguous than they would have been otherwise.

3.4.4 Ambiguity

More important for games is the topic of ambiguity. The moderate intentionalist claims that the work has several possible meanings and that the author decides which one is correct, but then a question is raised by opponents: if the work has several possible interpretations, why not allow for the work to be ambiguous (Irvin 2006, p.120; Trivedi 2015, p.721)?⁶⁷ However, Irvin's and Trivedi's question seems to be concerned with the premises of intentionalism in general, not problems unique to MAI, which weakens the force of the argument in this particular matter (it would be a poor strategy to question all facets of MAI by appealing to general criticism of intentionalism).

Two more relevant questions are posed by Irvin when she wonders why the author has the authority to settle interpretative disputes, and why she (the author)

⁶⁶ This is also noted by Beardsley (1992, p.38).

⁶⁷ Trivedi and Irvin neglect that MAI1 avoids this question as it does not allow for a work-meaning – and, by extension, ambiguity – independent of artistic intentions.

would not write a less ambiguous work (2006, p.120). The first question is indicative of lack of understanding of actual intentionalism and is ruled out by definition; that the author has this authority is a premise in intentionalism and constitutes a more fundamental problem, not one exclusively related to ambiguous passages. The second question, however, is devastating. She emphasizes the epistemic aspect of this problem, that we lack sufficient evidence to ascertain which of the possible meanings that was intended, and by so doing she unwittingly points to the more problematic *metaphysical* aspect of textual ambiguity. That we cannot adjudicate between competing interpretations is, as Irvin notes, an epistemic dilemma which may render interpretations rather pointless, but if the text is truly ambiguous and the author did not intend it to be, it follows that her intention was, in some sense, *not* successful, which Irvin does not sufficiently elaborate upon. As mentioned earlier, intentionalists have argued that conveyance of intentions is rarely a matter of complete success or failure and that if the author intended to convey $F(p)$ but $F(p \vee q)$ appears to be better supported by the work, the author only failed in conveying p unambiguously, the text still has the intended content (Stock 2017, pp.90-1). Trivedi, who argues against intentionalism, nevertheless agrees when he asserts that unintended ambiguity is not an example of failed, but of partly realized intentions (2015, p.712). This is too charitable an approach to ambiguity, biased in favour of intentionalism. The author intended the text to clearly convey $F(p)$ and nothing else, but instead created a text conveying $F(p \vee q)$, which is *not* what she intended, and depending on what p and q stand for, interpretations could deviate radically from what the author intended.⁶⁸ We may ask ourselves whether ghosts truly exist in *The Turn of the Screw* (James, [1898]1998), but if James intended it to be an unambiguous story he evidently failed, since their existence has been hotly debated. We cannot claim that James

⁶⁸ Currie similarly argues that ambiguity is a 'communicative failure' (2004, p.129).

was partially successful in conveying the 'supernatural' version of the story without introducing questions of which success-conditions we may posit and thus return to the discussion above regarding compatibility and 'meshing'.

This also ties in to the epistemic dilemma noted by Irvin and how we cannot know if $F(p)$ or $F(q)$ was intended, but to that one can also add the problem of how to approach ambiguity *per se*. We have no way of knowing whether the work is intended to be ambiguous or if James simply failed to make it unequivocal, whether he intended $F(p)$, $F(q)$, or $F(p \vee q)$. This indicates that ambiguity is not so much a partial conveyance of intended content as it is a failure of making the intended content the most plausible interpretation.

This problem is alleviated in video games if the designer is seen as the author, since her intentions can be tested. Sometimes we are not supposed to be able to solve a particular task: in *Dark Souls* there is a bridge guarded by a dragon that kills the player if she tries to cross. If the player is the author, we could get a narrative where the hero repeatedly tries to cross a bridge but is killed each time, so the player's intentions are not realized, but we cannot know for certain that she failed without resorting to extra-textual sources (e.g. asking her). If the *designer* is the author, we understand that she does not intend us to cross the bridge. Ambiguity is still possible, but becomes more manageable.

The fact that we can test the designers intentions partly solves the problem with ambiguity, especially when combined with the fact that intentions in games can often be analysed in terms of numerical values. When presented with two possible choices, we can try both and see which is successful (or, if both are, which is the *most* successful).⁶⁹ If both are equally good, we may presume that ambiguity was intended. In *Resident Evil 4* we may often choose which weapon to

⁶⁹ Cf. Jenkins, who also argues that players test hypotheses by playing (2004, p.126).

use, and since no one weapon is superior in most cases, we may presume that the story is intentionally ambiguous; the designer has no intention about which specific weapon we should use. Other parts are much harder (if not impossible) to get past if we refrain from using certain weapons – distant enemies can be impossible to kill without using the sniper rifle – and from that we may conclude that the designer intends us to use a particular weapon.

3.4.5 Partial success

Another problem is Lintott's conception of artworks as partially successful. This conception has already been criticized by Trivedi for the reason that we can neither assume nor know that intentions are even partly successful for the same reason we cannot know if they are *fully* realized – that is, because we would have to compare intentions and work-meaning independently – even if he does concede that it would be erroneous to think of success in such a binary way (2015, p.702). I have already explained why comparing work-meaning and intention is not as problematic as Trivedi claims, but there are deeper problems with partial success that Trivedi neglects, more specifically whether partial success is conceivable at all, and how we are to interpret cases of partial success. Firstly, to further elaborate on what Trivedi only hints at, it is questionable whether we can really presume success on the part of the artist by default. Moreover, one must add that this assumption neglects issues of which parts are successful and to what extent. We cannot assume even partial success when discussing any particular part of the work, but if we cannot do it when dealing with any single passage, it adds little to our interpretation of the work as a whole; the fact that some intentions have been realized says nothing about which these intentions *are*, so we are none the wiser as to the meaning of the work. My objection also undermines Stecker's thought that work-meaning and intentions are determined through a process of mutual

adjustment, because in cases where the intention has not been realized at all it cannot adjust our comprehension of the work, nor can our comprehension of the work adjust our understanding of the author's intention.

The dilemma appears more clearly when we compare a given interpretation regarding a specific fictional truth $F(p)$ and the artistic intention $F(\sim p)$, or, alternatively, $\sim F(p)$. The proposition will have to be rejected, since it is the polar opposite of the author's intention; the interpretative claim and the authorial intention thus become diametrically opposed and therefore mutually exclusive. This is not a partial success, it is complete failure, and indicates that the division of complete success/failure is no false dichotomy after all in the evaluation of any given proposition.

It could be objected that partial success cannot be measured in terms of individual intentions and singular fictional propositions, but must be evaluated as a whole in a single conjunction (i.e. an artist is partially successful if a certain quantity of intentions are realized), but then one has to answer which intentions are more 'essential' and how many must be realized for a work to be a success. One also has to answer what is most important: that a certain number of intentions is realized, or that the most essential intentions are.

The problem with the latter, a qualitative evaluation, is how to assess which fictional truths are essential to the story. These matters may seem intuitive, but then one forgets that this evaluation is in itself an interpretative statement (which may be erroneous). In games it may seem evident that the victory of the protagonist is the most important part, but to ignore all the gameplay before it would be like only focusing on the last page of a book, or the last minutes of a film. Bond would not seem heroic if the last shot of him was preceded by a most incompetent and poor performance as a secret agent, such a triumph would seem rather ridiculous. Similarly, if a player of *Hitman: Contracts* wants to generate a

narrative where Agent 47 kills only the designated target and remains undetected but fails to do so, and has to resort to an aggressive approach – killing anyone in sight in order to complete the mission – the narrative will retain the successful completion of the mission, but arguably lack the essential aspect of Agent 47's skills as a silent assassin. Conversely, if we opt for a quantitative evaluation of realized intentions one has to answer how many intentions must be realized, and any number seems arbitrary; furthermore, such an interpretation could ignore what is intuitively more significant to the story. It could be that all intentions were realized but the most significant one, so everything in the Bond-fiction would be realized but the final victory, and Agent 47 remains undetected but ultimately fails to kill the designated target. Even though all intentions but one are realized in both stories, we would intuitively not say that the fictions correspond well to their respective authors intentions.

Moreover, evaluation of any given proposition is also problematic for the reason that fictional propositions are interconnected and influence one another. In *Silent Hill 2* (Konami, 2001), combat against monsters is a cumbersome and clumsy activity, which reinforces the impression given by other parts of the narrative, that the protagonist James Sunderland is just an 'average Joe' in a surreal and hostile environment he is unqualified to handle. *Devil May Cry* also features combat against monsters, but here it is supposed to be acrobatic, fluid, and impressive, so an unskilled player whose performance is reminiscent of that in *Silent Hill 2* instead creates the contradictory (or pathetic) image of the protagonist Dante as a person with unjustified confidence in his skills as a warrior. Thus, partial realization of intentions may lead to a radically different narrative, *not* the intended one *sans* particular unrealized intentions.

It has been argued that most intentions are at least partially realized (Lintott 2002, pp.66-7). Exactly what it means for a work to partially convey authorial

intentions is debatable, but one can accept it (if only for the sake of argument) in the sense that alternative but equally/more possible interpretations are not radically different, even if they are not exactly what the creator wanted; for instance, if the author writes 'Cadillac' instead of 'Chevrolet' it could be argued that this still conveys that the object in question is a car. However, if partial success is sufficient for granting that a given work conveys an author's intentions, it is questionable whether authorial intentions are truly fallible in the way that MAI requires them to be; it is reminiscent of the cake-example in the sections on EAI, and how a creator can never completely fail to convey her intentions. An unskilled player may realize but a fraction of all her intentions, not providing sufficient evidence. If we regard the designer as author the textual evidence is nevertheless *there*, accessible to anyone with sufficient skills; not getting to the end of a game due to lack of skills is akin to not making it to the end of a novel/film due to lack of patience, it does not influence fictional truth as much as the interpreter's access to it. Further, it may still be the case that the work is not the best evidence for the authorial intentions, since the skills of a designer can be as limited as those of an author/director, but at least this way those flaws will be reduced to a minimum.

3.4.6 Changing intentions

As noted earlier, MAI has been criticized for vacillating between prioritizing work-meaning and intentions respectively (Irvin 2006, p.120; Stock 2017, p.14). This is in itself a devastating critique, since hypothetical and extreme intentionalism categorically prefer *one* of these factors. In games, however, this criticism gains even more force, since the two factors we switch between are not intentions and conventional meaning, but, in fact, two different intentions. If a player is killed by an enemy we may presume that she failed to realize her intention of getting past the enemy. However, the fact that one should get past the enemy is intended by

the designer (she put the enemy there and programmed the right path), so when the player fails we do not necessarily analyse the conventional meaning, but rather someone else's intention. If artistic intentions are important to moderate intentionalists, it would make for a more economical interpretation to focus on *one* person's intentions instead of switching back and forth. We would still be left with the inconvenient switch between intentions and textual meaning when the *designer* fails to realize her intentions, but at least this way we avoid exacerbating this issue. Otherwise, we would have to start with interpreting the player's intentions, and if these fail we move our focus to the designer's intentions, and finally, if both of these fail, to the conventional meaning. Since the first one fails so often, it would be better to *begin* with the designer's intentions.

It may be objected, as mentioned earlier, that after a number of attempts the player will alter her intention, which means that her intentions will all be realized eventually. However, this is problematic for several reasons, some of which have already been mentioned in the section on EAI: firstly, this means that the designer's intentions limit which intentions the player can adopt, raising the question of how the player is an author at all; secondly, this means that the player's intentions will change constantly throughout the playthrough as she adapts, alters, and rejects intentions depending on their success. If the designer is the author, we get a realized, unvarying intention, which is much easier to interpret than the constantly modified intentions of the player. Moreover, we find this out by engaging with the text alone, without having to consult extra-textual sources.

Thus, MAI is not a viable alternative to EAI. Although some criticism of MAI has been misdirected and some of its features may alleviate issues unique to video games, MAI nonetheless remains problematic, introducing issues absent in EAI. According to MAI, certain parts of a given narrative would either be void of meaning (unbeknownst to the interpreter), or acquire a meaning supported by the

work but not intended by the author (rendering authorial intentions redundant). Moreover, ambiguous passages raise questions of why authorial intentions should settle interpretative disputes when meaning is not conveyed clearly, and why ambiguity not intended by the author should nevertheless be regarded as partial success. The topic of partially realized intentions also introduces questions of whether evaluations of realized intentions should be primarily qualitative or quantitative, both of which have their own problematic consequences; this is an even more pressing issue in video games, where the player's intentions are seldom fully realized.

In brief, both extreme and moderate intentionalism are flawed, and the issues inherent to them are nothing but compounded when applied to video games. There are several difficulties in asserting that authorial intentions determine fictional truth, and these are retained and exacerbated in video games if players are seen as authors. Should one nevertheless insist on adopting intentionalism, it becomes more tenable if the *designer* is seen as the author.

Chapter 4 – Collective authorship

It was shown in the previous chapter that it is problematic to regard players as authors whose intentions determine fictional content. However, even the moderate version could be criticized for the assumption that the player is the *sole* author, so a counterargument would be to diminish her authorship, attributing it to both her and the designer, maintaining that a player has at least *some* authority. This could allow for game stories to be interactive, and the viability of this solution is the topic of this chapter.

What game scholars claim about authorship in general has already been presented in the previous chapter and requires no repetition, but it is worth emphasizing how little they elaborate on the concept of authorship *per se*. Whereas the last chapter focused on consequences following the premise that the player is the author, in this chapter I consider arguments for seeing video games as a collaborative project where both the designer and the player contribute to the creation of a story and the narrative conveying it. Some game scholars would argue that the player is more of a coauthor, but although no one can doubt that the player does participate to some extent in the narration of the story, it is debatable whether this suffices to endow her with genuine authorship; control over the presentation of the narrative does not necessarily translate into control of its *creation*, let alone its *content*. Collaborative authorship has been discussed in relation to cinema, where a common assumption is that the director is some kind of equivalent to the author (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.23). It has also been argued that the traditional conception of authorship is not applicable to cinema because of fundamental differences between cinematic and literary authorship, or at least that it is not applicable with regard to studio-produced films but perhaps in

independent films (Livingston 1997, p.132). It could be argued that the number of people involved in film production poses a challenge to the idea of a single author, a so-called auteur, but recently analytic philosophers have engaged with questions of authorship and how to distinguish coauthors from mere contributors (Hick 2014, p.147). Even if we accept the (debatable) premise that the player is a collaborator it does not follow that she must be a coauthor, and the failure to distinguish between the two could be what has lead game scholars to elevate the player to the status of author; Livingston and Carol Archer distinguish between a person who *controls* the art-making process and one who *contributes* to it (2010, pp.454-5), and several theorists agree that the caterer at a film set is not a coauthor, even if she does in some way contribute to the production of the film (Sellors 2007, p.269; Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, pp.27-8; Livingston 2011, p.223).

However, arguments have primarily been directed at novels and films, and have not been applied to video games. The question to be treated in this section is whether there are good reasons to see the player as a coauthor without making the definition of authorship so wide as to encompass readers and film spectators as well, as that would make literature and film equally interactive. Note that I adopt some unspecified version of intentionalism in order to examine who should be ascribed authorship of the narrative; whether intentionalism is an adequate mode of interpretation is a different matter.

4.1 Defining coauthorship

Gaut asserts that the common view in film studies is the auteurist one, that a film has a single author (1997, p.151). He objects to it, saying that there cannot be a single author of a film because of the collaborative nature of film production (Gaut 1997, p.150).⁷⁰ He then criticizes various strategies of defending auteurist

⁷⁰ Similar arguments have been presented by e.g. Petrie ([1973]2008), Kawin

conceptions. For instance, one could claim that the author controls the work's 'artistically significant features', but Gaut objects that this could potentially include *any* feature, leaving nothing to do for the collaborators (1997, p.155, 2003, p.632). Further, many of these features – acting, editing etc. – are not exclusively attributable to the director anyway (Gaut 1997, p.156). Nor can one argue that the director, if not in *total* control, at least has *sufficient* control over the production of the work whilst making use of others' talents – similar to how an architect designs a building which he lets other people build for him – because first of all, Gaut contends that people who make significant artistic differences *should* be acknowledged as artistic collaborators, and secondly, collaboration is of a higher importance in cinema than many other art-forms (1997, p.157). Moreover, the director lacks precise control over many factors, such as the minute details of an actor's performance (Gaut 1997, p.158, p.171n33, 2003, p.632).⁷¹ Gaut asserts that theatre differs in some respects, that the performance may be collaborative without vitiating the exclusive authorship of the playwright; characters are controlled by the playwright and are therefore not influenced by the actors' performance in the way they are in films, where visual and auditory features of the recording further specify properties of the given character (1997, p.163).

Livingston notes that it is taken for granted that people have a shared understanding of what authorship is (1997, p.132). His own definition is that an author is 'the agent (or agents) who intentionally make(s) an utterance, where "utterance" refers to any action, an intended function of which is expression or communication' (Livingston 1997, p.134). A work of art does not have several authors only because its creation involves more than one person, it depends on

([1987]2008), Bernstein ([2006]2008), and Christensen ([2006]2008). For similar arguments applied to the production of literary works, see Inge (2001).

⁷¹ The same argument is used by Kawin ([1987]2008, p.191, p.198).

the contribution they make (Livingston 2005, p.62). Livingston emphasizes that the person one considers to be an author depends on how much one values different kinds of involvement, so that one can always claim a given discourse has multiple authors if authorship merely requires endowing it with any of its properties (1997, p.134, 2005, p.68). Furthermore, Livingston contends that an author needs an intention to express some kind of attitude and an idea of which means with which to express it, and he therefore rules out completely private authorial acts as they lack the intention to express anything (2005, pp.70-1). He also distinguishes between genuine 'joint authorship' and other kinds of collaboration: the fact that several people contributed to the making of the utterance does not mean that they worked together (Livingston 2005, pp.75-7). According to Livingston, authorship can be a matter of hierarchy, where one person's contribution is ranked higher than others; it can also be that the contributions of others do not amount to authorship, but assistance (2005, pp.77-8). If a single person delegates to others what should be done and how, the work is not coauthored (Livingston 2011, p.223).

Livingston's definition of joint authorship is that there are two or more contributors, A_1, \dots, A_n , who share responsibility for a single utterance. Further, they must share the aim of contributing to said utterance, as well as the control of the making and shaping of the work when relevant decisions are made; it must also be possible for their respective plans to be realized simultaneously (Livingston 2005, p.79). This means, Livingston explains, that joint authorship requires the work to be compatible with the authors' respective intentions and their mutual belief on this matter (2005, p.80). To summarize:

- (1) A_1 intends to contribute to the making of utterance U as an expression of A_1 's attitudes.

(2) A_1 intends to realize (1) by acting on, and in accordance with sub-plans that mesh with those of the other contributors, including sub-plans relative to the manner in which the utterance is to be produced and to the utterance's expressive contents.

(3) A_2 intends to contribute to the making of utterance U as an expression of A_2 's attitudes.

(4) A_2 intends to realize (3) by acting on, and in accordance with sub-plans that mesh with those of the other contributors, including sub-plans relative to the manner in which the utterance is to be produced and to the utterance's expressive contents (and so on for other contributors).

(5) A_1, \dots, A_n mutually believe that they have the attitudes (1)–(4).

(Livingston 2005, pp.83-4)

Sondra Bacharach and Deborah Tollefsen object to Gaut, underscoring the difference between contributing to a work (including its 'aesthetically relevant properties') and *authoring* one (2010, p.25). They also object to Livingston and his application of Bratman's conception of shared intention, arguing that it mainly applies to a small group of agents working face-to-face, not large-scale film productions, nor to improvisations where few intentions are shared between agents prior to the performance (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, pp.26-7). In sum, they claim that Livingston's analysis is too strong, excluding too many, whereas Gaut's excludes too few (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.28). Instead, they utilize Margaret Gilbert's plural subject theory, which states that in order for two persons to be a plural subject, they need to be 'jointly committed to doing something as a body' (Gilbert 2006, p.145). This entails working as a unified subject, as if the group were a single author (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, pp.28-9). This does not require specific, unchanging plans about each member's contribution and its expressive content, as not even a *single* author always has specific intentions

about this; nor do their respective sub-plans have to mesh (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2011, pp.226-8). For these reasons the caterer on a film set is not a coauthor, since she lacks the joint commitment of making a film; nor does a saboteur become a coauthor when she inserts her own images into the film, since the film crew is not committed to doing something together with the saboteur as part of the group (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.30). Moreover, if a group of authors write a chapter each of a book, taking credit only for their *own* chapter, we would instead have a case of *multiple* authorship, as the authors merely contribute with independent works to a collective product, quite different from when a group cooperates in the writing of a book as a singular, holistic work, since in the former case ‘there is *no joint commitment to write the book together*’ (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2015, p.332; original emphasis). This also means that if an unfinished work is completed posthumously the original author OA and the new author NA are not coauthors as there is no joint commitment (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2015, p.332). Further, if NA exerts himself so as to make a work corresponding to OA’s intentions – for instance in terms of content and style – NA has no real control over his own section’s significant aspects, apart from assuring that they are consistent with what OA would have wanted (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2015, p.333).

Darren Hudson Hick emphasizes the importance of responsibility, saying that the author is responsible for what a work expresses and how, since she selects and structures the work’s content (2014, p.151). A saboteur who inserts new footage in a film does not become a coauthor, he explains, as we would not hold the director responsible for the sabotage; if the saboteur is an author at all, she has authored a *new* work (Hick 2014, pp.151-2). Hick objects to the importance of joint intentions, and like Bacharach and Tollefsen he argues that multiple authorship differs from coauthorship since in the former, each author

takes responsibility only for his own contribution (2014, p.152, 2015, p.340). Another difference is that a multiply-authored work has 'discrete, identifiable units', whereas a coauthored one is unified (2014, p.153).

4.1.1 Player as contributor

Using these theories as a point of departure, can the player be regarded as a coauthor? Gaut notes several problems with retaining the concept of a singular author in art-production including several contributors, and these could apply to games. Much of what the player does can be considered to be 'artistically significant features',⁷² as gameplay has an impact on the representation of the story; the aesthetic appeal of the way a player rhythmically chains together attacks in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady Studios, 2009; henceforth *Arkham Asylum*) or *Devil May Cry* adds much to the image one gets of Batman and Dante (the respective protagonists of the games) and can be compared to a professional performance of an actor. As Gaut argues, the actor's performance cannot be attributed to the director alone; likewise, the player's performance cannot be attributed to the designer, because just as the director lacks precise control over the actor's performance, a designer lacks control over the player. However, it is important to note the discrepancy between Gaut's accounts of the impact of an author's performance in film and theatre respectively, as he does not think the authorship of the playwright is subverted by an actor's performance. This conception of theatre is, in principle, identical to what Stock and Currie say about each reader's unique imagining and how it has no impact on literary content: a theatre actor's idiosyncratic interpretation of a character (manifest in her

⁷² Gaut himself notes the problem of ascertaining what is to count as an artistically significant feature; so does Livingston (2005, p.90). One could argue that this has to be assessed in each individual case, but this fact does not obviate general discussions.

performance) does not influence the character, nor does a reader's interpretation of a literary narrative influence *its* characters. Game scholars who argue that gameplay affects the game story's protagonist erroneously and implicitly analyse games as if they were like film in the respect that the representation determines the truth-value of fictional propositions. However, as mentioned at the end of section 3.1, this would mean that each playthrough generates its own story, which precludes the possibility of discussing any given game. A more intuitive approach is to see games as a set of instructions on what to perform, akin to a play instructing actors, where the interpretative engagement of the interpreter – i.e. the gameplay – has no impact on fictional truths. Just as a playwright may leave certain fictional propositions indeterminate so as to endow actors with more performative liberty, a game designer could offer the player a range of choices in her 'performance'.⁷³ In that case the player does not coauthor a unique narrative in her playthrough only because she makes Batman/Dante use a different item/weapon or a different combination of attacks; she is in principle no different from a theatre actor who chooses different gestures and intonation in a given performance.

It could be objected that theatre actors are coauthors too, that their performances are artistically significant features and that the playwright has no more control of this than a film director, making the distinction between films and theatre arbitrary.⁷⁴ That would yield the awkward consequence that each performance of a play would be a unique narrative, which likewise would allow each playthrough to be its own narrative, allowing for players to be coauthors. However, this illustrates the very flaws with Gaut's conception of coauthorship, as

⁷³ See Kania (2018) for criticism of viewing players as performers. What is pertinent for my reasoning is not whether they are performers, but whether they partake in the production and/or instantiation of the work.

⁷⁴ For criticism of the distinction between a theatre play and a screenplay, see Koivumäki (2010).

this would also mean that a saboteur becomes a coauthor when she makes aesthetically significant contributions to someone else's film and the director is unable to stop her (lacking control over her actions). A definition that allows anyone to become a coauthor is a deficient one, so we had better turn to other alternatives instead.

4.1.2 Control over work-creation

As Livingston explains, the involvement of several people in the creation of a work is not necessarily equivalent to artistic cooperation (2005, p.62). A person who supervises others on what to do, whose staff does not add anything 'artistically significant', and who discards material not conforming to her vision is the sole author of the work (Livingston 2005, p.84). In films, the author is the person who has the final say in what is to be included in the film, even if she may delegate tasks to others (Livingston 1997, p.142). In other words, the author is 'a person who has played the role of the dominant coordinating collaborator in the creation of the work' (Livingston 2009, p.77). One could also see the game designer as someone who delegates to the player the task of performing the narrative, just as a director does with actors.

Livingston provides some examples that illustrate his point further, which can be applied to games. He mentions how Harriet Andersson stares into the camera in *Sommaren med Monika* (Bergman, 1953), and explains that even if this gesture was her idea, it was the director Bergman who 'decided to change the lighting and camera position quite dramatically as the shot continues' (Livingston 2009, p.79), and who chose to include it in the final cut. In a related vein, Hick also notes that although others may make suggestions, the author decides whether alterations to the work should be kept (2014, p.154). Livingston argues that even

when Bergman took other people's advice or used music composed by someone else, it was nevertheless he who decided what to use and how, so he remains the author (1997, p.144, 2005, p.85). Andersson's performance is arguably an artistically significant contribution, so Gaut would probably regard her as a coauthor, but that would be to neglect that it is up to Bergman whether her performance is to be included in the final cut. Likewise, players can make artistically significant additions not originally thought of by the designer, but it is the latter who decides beforehand what may be included by programming the mechanics and tasks to be completed; failed sessions are rejected, and the player has to try again. A player may devise a specific combination of attacks in *Devil May Cry*, but the player's actions must ultimately contribute to the completion of the mission's goals. It could be argued that the designer is not able to cut and re-shoot scenes like a director, and therefore has no say in which performance to include as long as it leads to victory, but as already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter several game scholars speak of an 'ideal path' in games. In some games, this 'ideal path' is evident by virtue of the game's scoring system. Both *Devil May Cry* and *Arkham Asylum* display a gauge during combat sequences indicating the number of points the player acquires; the better she performs, the more points she earns. Many games contain similar systems for rating the player's performance, rewarding good performances. Note, however, that how gameplay is evaluated can differ radically between games: in contrast to *Arkham Asylum*, stealth-oriented games like *Hitman: Blood Money* (IO Interactive, 2006) *discourage* aggressive gameplay; players are rewarded for killing as *few* enemies as possible. With such strict guidelines, one may ask in what sense players can still add anything artistically significant. Players have no control over which playstyle is rewarded/punished, it is the *designer* who has the final say on the nature and details of the 'ideal path', and even though she indirectly receives

'suggestions' by players as they try different playstyles, the designer is not obliged to conform; the designer of *Arkham Asylum* does not perform the stylish acrobatic combat, but her 'instructions' are sufficient to make her the author.

4.1.3 Authorship as an expression of attitudes

Livingston further objects to Gaut and says that when several people are involved in the making of a film, the author is the 'dominant coordinating collaborator in the creation of the work, provided, that is, that the work has been made by this person with the aim of expressing his or her attitudes (or, in the absence of any expressive content, with the aim of endowing the work with artistic qualities)' (2009, p.77).⁷⁵ Livingston concedes that Andersson's intentions mesh with Bergman's, but she does not express her own attitudes even indirectly (2009, p.79). This is yet another reason why the player can hardly be considered to be an author: through playing she discovers a story already contained within the game, so she does not intend to contribute to the making of an utterance as an expression of *her* attitudes, but rather *discovers* an utterance conveying those of the *designer*.

Note that this consequence does not only follow from the relationship between Andersson and Bergman, but also from the motivation underlying her performance. Livingston makes a distinction between *producing* a text and *authoring* one, where the former does not include the intention of 'intentionally expressing anything' (2005, p.72). As an example, he says that a person who practices typing by producing texts does not author anything. Likewise, one could argue that one does not necessarily author anything when one produces an audiovisual text in the form of a film or a game, which is why Andersson is not an

⁷⁵ I will only speak of expressive content/qualities, in which I include properties distinct from mental attitudes – such as aesthetic unity – as these qualities are also 'expressed' in some sense.

author, in spite of her participation in film-production. Similarly, one could argue that the playthrough is a kind of text, but if the player lacks this attitude she is no more of an author than Andersson.

However, Livingston's argument can be criticized by suggesting that Andersson intended to express her own attitudes through her performance of a role that happened to fit that intention. Likewise, a player could claim that the gameplay expresses her intentions, so that the designer's and her intention mesh, meaning that the requirement for expression would be met. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this is sufficient for elevating a person to the status of author. The strategic choice on the player's part to play a game she knows will express what she wants it to cannot be enough to make her a coauthor; a person can express her views on morals by reciting Aesop's fables, but this does not make her a coauthor of them.

Livingston does consider performers who use the characters they portray as a means of expressing their own views, but asserts that they still lack sufficient control over the film as a whole (2009, pp.79-80). Paul Sellors criticizes this argument since the notion of control does not appear in Livingston's definition (2007, p.266). Although Sellors is right that Livingston's definition does not mention it explicitly, he neglects that the necessity of control follows because, as Livingston explains himself, sufficient control is necessary if an artist's contribution is to be non-accidental (Livingston 2005, p.88). Without sufficient control, an author could never make any contribution to the work. It may be difficult to define what constitutes control over the production and when it is sufficient, but we can nevertheless easily identify whether this requirement is met in extreme cases: if the author's collaborators do exactly as they are told in order to express her attitudes, she can be thought of as the true author and, conversely, if they do not

carry out *any* instructions – except when they happen to correspond to their own – she hardly counts as an author.

It is reasonable to assume that Andersson and Bergman intended to contribute to the making of *Sommaren med Monika* as an expression of Bergman's attitudes, and both intended to realize this intention by acting on and in accordance with his sub-plans, including those relative to the film's production and expressive contents. Bergman does not seem to have been acting in accordance with sub-plans meshing with those of Andersson, contrary to the criteria for coauthorship. If Andersson accepted an asymmetric relation where Bergman adapted to her intentions only when these provided a superior means of expressing his own it follows, implicitly, that she surrendered her potential authorial power to Bergman.

This asymmetric relation also obtains in games, as the player's ability to express her attitudes is limited by the designer who has the final say in what can be included in a game, not only since the designer programmed it, but because the designer, when making the game, does not act in a way that meshes with the player's sub-plans, should these diverge from her own. Hence, it is irrelevant whether the game expresses what the player wishes. Should one insist that the player does intend to express her views through gameplay it would nevertheless not suffice to make her a coauthor, not only because there is no mutual agreement that both the designer's and the player's attitudes be expressed, but also because the player's control is limited by mechanics implemented by the designer in a way analogous to the director's control over the film-production, so she cannot express anything contrary to the designer's intentions; any convergence of the attitudes of the designer and the player is accidental. Andersson could have acted any way she wanted, but Bergman could always stop the take or cut it in the editing room;

in games this authorial control is more palpable in some respects, as the game imposes restrictions on what the player can do. Similarly, even when assuming that the player *does* attempt to express her own view she is nevertheless obliged to make sure that these mesh with the designer's sub-plans (if only because the mechanics of the game do not give her any other option), an obligation the designer lacks, similar to how Andersson must express the attitudes of Bergman but not vice versa.

Moreover, Livingston allows for coauthors to agree to disagree (2005, p.83). It could be argued that the player and designer do this in some sense through the gameplay, but this possibility is precluded by the lack of reciprocity between designer and player: the player is unable to 'say' things contrary to the beliefs of the designer, she *has* to play according to the rules of the game, but the designer does not have to adapt to the player. Whenever the player makes a suggestion as to how the narrative should progress it has to be 'approved of' by the designer, so she does not really contribute as much as she chooses one of several options, all of which are authored by the designer.

Here one could say that the player has the power to select and arrange information since, as noted by Thabet earlier, she controls the camera, and can select which information to include. Further, Livingston concedes that authorship can be a matter of degree (1997, p.143), so it could be that the player has *some* authorship. This is problematic, however, because first of all, many games do not allow the player to control the camera or to add/remove content significant to the story, and secondly, even in games where the inclusion and arrangement of content is up to the player one still has to answer why this would amount to *authorship* of the narrative, not simply a contribution to its making.⁷⁶ A projectionist

⁷⁶ One could argue that games with branching narratives differ from more linear ones, seeing how the former allow players to include content by letting them

selects and arranges the reels at each screening, and readers select in which order to read chapters, but this power is restricted to the *conveyance* of the narrative, not to the narrative as such. This view fits with Livingston's requirement of meshing sub-plans, since even if a delusional projectionist would believe that she contributed to the expression of the director's attitudes by showing scenes in the wrong order, the director does not intend to act in a way that allows the projectionist's sub-plans to mesh with her own, so there can be no joint authorship. Endowing the player with an authorial role but not the projectionist seems arbitrary.

4.1.4 Group membership

Similar to Livingston, Bacharach and Tollefsen assert that one does not become a coauthor only by virtue of sharing the expressive intentions of an author. In contrast, they object to Livingston's requirement concerning meshing sub-plans since even a *singular* author may fail to have coherent sub-plans, and they argue that meshing rather pertains to the *quality* of authorship, not its *existence* (2011, p.228). This argument may be based on a misunderstanding, since a charitable reading of Livingston's demand for meshing sub-plans could allow for failure to shape intentions in a coherent way as long as one *attempts* to make them mesh; if coauthorship depended on whether one *succeeds* in making sub-plans mesh, it would follow that authorship could be vitiated only because a member misunderstands or forgets some aspect of another member's intentions, and this does not seem to be Livingston's view. Moreover, they misconstrue Livingston's requirement for agreement between coauthors, as he says that it is enough that dissenting coauthors at least agree to disagree (Livingston 2005, p.83). This is

choose different outcomes, but this does not differ fundamentally from a spectator choosing between the theatrical and director's cut of the same film; this would not count as altering the content of an *interactive* narrative, but rather as choosing one of several *linear* ones.

almost identical to what Bacharach and Tollefsen say themselves when they refer to a group of artists whose members may 'agree to engage in certain art-making practices or to create an artwork with certain artistic properties qua members of the group, even if they personally do not agree that this is the right thing to do' (2010, p.31).

Bacharach and Tollefsen further criticize Livingston's requirement of meshing sub-plans with the assertion that the psychological structure in Livingston's definition is not likely to be present in the minds of all coauthors in a large group (2010, p.27). They add that detailed knowledge about a work's intended content is too strong a requirement for even a *singular* person to qualify as author; it is not reasonable to expect people to be able to commit in advance to the creation of a work with specific properties, as these are likely to change over time, just as a single author may change his intentions over time (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2011, pp.227-8).

This also seems like a misunderstanding, as Livingston explains that his model requires 'some measure of reciprocal awareness' (2005, p.82), which is not necessarily equivalent to detailed knowledge. He further asserts that joint authorship only requires that intentions possess a 'significant level of compatibility in the plans on which the various agents act' (Livingston 2005, p.80), not that they be entirely harmonious. A single author certainly has *some* awareness of her own intentions, even if they do not fully mesh, and she will retain this awareness throughout the production of the work even as the intentions change, so what Livingston implies is the need for *coordination* of sub-plans. His definition does not seem to require that all properties of a work remain unaltered throughout the creation – at least his definition is not *incompatible* with this possibility – so long as all coauthors are aware of the change, and their sub-plans still mesh. That sub-

plans mesh must not necessarily be taken to mean that they result in a non-contradictory narrative, nor that they remain the same from start to finish, only that any contradictions and alterations must be intended by the authors.⁷⁷ Moreover, doing away with the requirement of meshing sub-plans and shared knowledge would be contradictory, seeing how they themselves underscore the importance of joint commitments, which includes coordination of individual actions so that members 'create the work as if they were a single author' (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.29). They do not explain how such coordination could be possible without shared knowledge and intentions among the members.

Furthermore, Bacharach and Tollefsen's criticism of Livingston also contradicts their own refutation of Sellor's application of 'we-intentions'. Sellor, drawing on John Searle, argues that an individual's intention as to what she will contribute is irrelevant; the performance of a symphony does not consist of 'an aggregate of individual performances motivated by the belief that by intentionally performing part of a score one is contributing to the performance of the piece' (2007, p.268). Instead, Sellor's defends so-called 'we-intentions', that the actions of an individual are included in – and have the goal of realizing – the collective intention of the group (2007, pp.268-9). Drawing on Anthonie Meijers, Bacharach and Tollefsen criticize the idea of we-intentions since such intentions need not be shared; someone could erroneously see herself as a member of the authorial team of a film whilst contributing nothing (even if her intentions could happen to be identical to the 'real' author's) (2010, pp.27-8).⁷⁸ However, if Bacharach and

⁷⁷ Which is not to say that the author(s) intends to realize a contradiction as such, only that both *conjuncts* in the contradiction are intended.

⁷⁸ They may have misconstrued Sellor's argument. If we-intentions are collective by definition, it would be impossible for an individual to possess *genuine* we-intentions unless she were part of the group (otherwise her actions/intentions would be excluded by the collective intention), although she could naturally have the *erroneous belief* that she possessed we-intentions; their objection is still relevant, albeit not entirely for the reason they seem to believe.

Tollefsen refute Sellor's application of we-intentions for not necessarily being shared by everyone, it seems contradictory to refute Livingston's requirement that intentions *should* be shared. Moreover, they contradict themselves even further as they defend their own view by referring to Gilbert, according to whom all parties not only must express their readiness to participate in the joint commitment, but must also share knowledge about this fact and be aware that this knowledge is shared by other members of the group (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.29). Drawing on Gilbert's concept of plural subjects they explain that 'individuals must be jointly committed to creating a work of art as a body in order to count as part of the plural subject or social group' (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.31). It is unclear how this formulation differs from Sellors and/or Livingston, as it could be reconcilable with either. If this commitment can be 'solipsistic', possessed by an individual not recognized by others to be a member, they effectively present the same argument they criticize Sellors for defending, but as they show themselves, such a theory is deficient. If this joint commitment must be known by other members their theory aligns with Livingston's. Hence, not only do Bacharach and Tollefsen formulate an untenable line of reasoning that refutes the only two possible alternatives – subjects either have to share or do not have to share intentions – they contradict their own arguments by presenting a solution which differs in no significant way from Livingston's. It seems evident that there must be some shared knowledge among the coauthors as to what to do and how, otherwise the work resulting from their contributions would be accidental, with people working in such a way that their artistic production serendipitously results in a single work where the constituents happen to converge to a certain extent (because if they do not converge it would rather be a collection of works instead of a singular one). Thus, although Bacharach and Tollefsen explicitly argue against Livingston's demands for common knowledge and meshing of sub-plans, it seems

as though these are necessary and supported implicitly by their own line of reasoning.

They agree with Gaut that one cannot invoke the concept of sufficient control as a means of attributing authorship to a single person when the creation of the work (such as a film) involves several people, because that person still lacks sufficient control over the film as a whole (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.24). However, they themselves raise the question of what would constitute 'sufficient control', and note that the notion needs further elaboration as Gaut does not provide any explanation, but nevertheless insist on refuting authorship with reference to this very notion without elaborating on its definition, saying that they, like Gaut, find auteur theory to be inadequate (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.32n3). This is not a valid argument. They explain that they dislike auteur theory with reference to a notion they themselves note to be deficient as it stands ('sufficient control'), only because doing so supports their preferred conclusion. It could be that auteur theory seems inadequate *because* they lack a proper definition of sufficient control, so the strength of their argument is diminished by the fact that they do not examine this notion further. I will not examine the notion in detail either, but suffice it to say that if we construe 'sufficient control' as the control to bring about the desired result and to prevent undesired ones, either directly or indirectly (by having others realize one's intentions), and everyone in the group is committed to and aware of this, then it does seem like authors can have sufficient control even when actors make artistically significant contributions. From that it also follows that the game designer can be the only author and that she has sufficient control insofar as players are required to realize her intentions.

Instead of speaking of meshing sub-plans, Bacharach and Tollefsen attempt to define coauthors with reference to membership of the author group, so that

even if, for instance, a caterer happens to share the intentions of the authorial team, this is not sufficient to make her a coauthor of the film. The strength of this line of reasoning is that it makes it more clear why the caterer does not become a coauthor of a film as soon as she shares the director's intentions and, by extension, why players do not become coauthors when they share the designer's intentions. Even if a player has the same intentions as the designer on all relevant matters and does everything she can to realize them, we now have a reason as to why she lacks the authority necessary for her contributions to be classified as those of a coauthor: she is not a member of the authorial group. This addition is significant, because otherwise any person could potentially become a coauthor as long as she conformed to the 'true' author's intentions, even when the latter has no interest in cooperating with others. Although Livingston's account of meshing sub-plans are already sufficient to preclude a saboteur from becoming a coauthor, we now have further reason not to ascribe her (or a player) the role of a coauthor.

The initial flaw with their conception is that it is in part motivated by the limitations they perceive in Livingston's definition, regarding how it does not seem possible for larger groups of people to meet the requirements outlined. Livingston himself objects to this allegation, suggesting that his model can account for larger groups as well (2011, pp.221-2), but his defence is redundant. They accuse Livingston of developing a theory that 'by default (or definition), rules out as authored all artworks created by a large number of individuals' (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.27) but fail to realize that they commit the same fallacy by, conversely, developing a theory that by default/definition *includes* a large number of individuals. Livingston doubts that his definition is as limiting as Bacharach and Tollefsen make it out to be, but, *contra* Livingston, it could be preferable to 'bite the bullet' and accept that, in practice, there are limits to the quantity of coauthors for

any given work; we cannot change definitions to suit our own preferences. This does not influence the conception of players as authors – since I work with the assumption that authorship can be assigned to a single person in the group designing the game, so a single-player game would only have two coauthors anyway, including the player – but it is nevertheless important to note that Bacharach and Tollefsen have a questionable motive for constructing their model as they do.

Another problem with their definition is that Bacharach and Tollefsen place too high an emphasis on group membership at the expense of intentions. Their notion of ‘working as one body’ can be construed in such a way that practically *anyone* can become a coauthor, so the caterer could presumably be a coauthor only by becoming part of the authorial team, regardless of what intentions she has and how small her contribution is. That would also allow for players to be coauthors, even if they make no significant contributions. However, it would be absurd to claim that a caterer adding nothing to the ‘utterance’ that is the film, or a player adding nothing of importance to the game, are both coauthors only because of membership in the respective authorial groups. Conversely, the director could potentially *not* be a coauthor if she is not a member of the authorial group, even if she and the rest of the crew fulfil Livingston’s requirements of shared intentions and meshing sub-plans. Bacharach and Tollefsen doubt that the caterer shares this joint commitment to make a film, but it is problematic that the only thing required to change this fact is a mutual change of attitude in the caterer and the authorial group. As Livingston notes, the decision to deny a caterer membership in the authorial group is probably not arbitrary, but one based on what contribution the caterer makes to the production of the artwork (rather than the authoring thereof) (2011, p.223). This indicates that membership is perhaps not a

prerequisite for authorship, but a *consequence* of it. Bacharach and Tollefsen try to do away with the requirements motivating membership and then ascribe a causal property to what is merely an effect.

Bacharach and Tollefsen seem to attempt to forestall such consequences when they define what it means to be part of a joint body, but the way they do it may invalidate their own idea that membership is both necessary and sufficient. Drawing on Gilbert's plural subject theory, they explain that to work as one body is to 'avoid saying things contrary to the group belief and to act in accordance with the belief', and further to 'work in unity with others in order to construct, as far as possible, a unified subject' (both quotes from Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.29). To this they add that joint commitments differ from individual ones in that they are possessed by groups. However, in order to avoid saying things contrary to the group belief and act in accordance with it, it seems crucial that each author fulfils Livingston's demand for meshing sub-plans. Bacharach and Tollefsen dispute the necessity of meshing, but it is unclear how a coauthor can act in accordance with the group belief if sub-plans do *not* mesh. Another option would be that each member of the team serendipitously happens to act in a way that is in accordance with the group belief, but if there is no coordination whatsoever it raises the question of what constitutes membership. It is questionable how one is truly working together if Bacharach and Tollefsen's definition of it is only some kind of agreement with no necessary consequences for the artwork.

Bacharach and Tollefsen also attempt to explain how people in a large group can be coauthors, in spite of their comparatively small contribution, by saying that a group can 'jointly commit to a specified mechanism for determining the shape of the film, namely the director's say-so' (2010, p.30). In that case the player could be a coauthor, as one could argue that she is committed to the

designer's say-so. Nevertheless, this definition is problematic, as it could make someone a coauthor only because of an agreement, even in the absence of any real contribution; a player could, theoretically, be a coauthor even if she never played the game, as long as she was part of the author group. Bacharach and Tollefsen are aware of such consequences, as they claim that authorship can be attributed to a person whose contribution is nonexistent, and ascribe authorship of a given song to both Paul McCartney and John Lennon even in cases where only one of them worked on it, only because of the agreement that all they write be attributable to both (2010, p.30). Awarding someone the status of author even when she is committed to someone else's supervision, and irrespective of whether said person made a contribution, is not only absurd and counterintuitive, it is hard to reconcile with their own claim that joint commitments are had by groups and cannot be made by a single person (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, p.29). If the author's word is final, decisions regarding the film are *individual* commitments. The only joint commitment is the one prior to the start of the film production, that everyone relinquish their authority to the benefit of the director; it was a joint commitment to make no more joint commitments, and Bacharach and Tollefsen seem to assume that the collaborative nature of this first commitment will 'carry over' to subsequent decisions. In that case it is unclear what is *not* a case of coauthorship; even *coercion* would be a joint commitment and a case of coauthorship, since a person is committed to fully give up her choices.

Moreover, one could argue that the emphasis on membership is also incompatible with Bacharach and Tollefsen's claim that coauthorship involves mutual responsiveness between agents (2015, p.333). As for Lennon and McCartney, it is true that if one of them remains inactive he does not say things contrary to the other person's belief, but is unclear how he acts in accordance with

that belief if he does not act at all. If a person shows up at a film set and does nothing to prevent the production she would hardly be elevated to the status of coauthor only because she does not act in a way contrary to the belief of the director. Likewise, a player does not become a coauthor only because she does not play the game in a way contrary to the intentions of the designer.

Furthermore, this exaggerated emphasis on group-membership contradicts Bacharach and Tollefsen's own distinction between *authoring* a work and *contributing to the making* thereof, a distinction they present in order to avoid making authors out of 'everyone who contributes aesthetically relevant properties' (2010, p.25). These points are crucial, as we would otherwise have to include saboteurs in author groups, but it also implies that membership is insufficient for authorship, as is mere participation in the making of a work. For this reason we are probably also right to exclude players, as their intended addition of artistically significant features can be interpreted, at most, as a contribution to the *making* of a work, if even that (since one could argue that the game is complete at its release, and that the player does not contribute to the making anymore than a projectionist does to films screened in the cinema).

Bacharach and Tollefsen also claim that two authors whose respective intentions are incompatible can still coauthor a work (2011, p.228). Livingston counters by saying that 'this broad commitment to the making of "a film" does not suffice to constitute a group that actually coauthors a particular work' (2011, p.224). He is right, because this conception could potentially make *anything* into coauthorship, regardless of how little interaction there is between agents: if two people are jointly committed to making a film, but their intentions are so incompatible that they end up making two separate films – never cooperating throughout the production of either – we would hardly maintain that both films are

coauthored only with reference to their initial agreement.

Finally, by doing away with the requirement for meshing sub-plans it is unclear how we can maintain the distinction between multiple authorship and coauthorship, which seems rather important as Bacharach and Tollefsen themselves criticize Sellors for neglecting it (2010, p.25). Authors writing one short story each for a single volume have considerably less meshing sub-plans than people authoring a single narrative together, but they have the same degree of membership in an author group, all being committed to the creation of the anthology. This is yet another reason why group-membership cannot be a sufficient factor for making someone a coauthor, meaning that even if the player would be part of the author group of a given game, that alone would not suffice to make her a coauthor of the game's story.

4.1.5 Responsibility

So far I have discussed shared intentions, meshing sub-plans, and group membership as factors potentially allowing for players to become coauthors, but there is one more element to consider: responsibility. Several scholars have mentioned responsibility as an important factor in relation to authorship (Currie 1995a, p.262, 1995b, pp.20-1, p.27; Gaut 1997, p.157; Kania 2005, p.48; Kiefer 2005, p.46; Livingston 2005, p.83, 2009, pp.72-3; Nathan 2005, p.36; Sellors 2007, p.267; Thomson-Jones 2008, p.77; Livingston and Archer 2010, p.440, p.448; Fernflores 2010, p.69; Killin 2015, pp.335-6). Responsibility is mentioned by some game scholars as well, who ascribe at least part of it to the player (Aarseth 1997, p.62, 2003, p.777; Atkins 2003, p.77-8; Grodal 2003, p.150; Davidson 2008, p.372; Ryan and Costello 2012, pp.112-15, pp.121-3; Servitje 2014, p.379; Thabet 2015, p.59). Bacharach and Tollefsen assert that in a multiply-authored work, each

contributor ‘takes responsibility and credit solely for their *individual contributions*’ (2015, p.332; original emphasis). Livingston also mentions responsibility in his definition of joint authorship, and how it must be shared by coauthors of a given work (2005, p.83). Hick argues that in cases of sabotage, the director is not *responsible* for the film created by the saboteur’s intervention, which is why she is not a coauthor of the work resulting from the saboteur’s actions (2014, pp.151-2).

If responsibility constitutes a better criterion for establishing authorship common practice would indicate that players are not held responsible for the game’s content: some games are praised for their stories (which would be a narcissistic kind of praise if the one responsible for the creation of the story is the player herself), and law-suits are filed against designers if their games have inappropriate content, not the players. However, it could be objected that this is descriptive, and that both praise and law-suits have been misdirected, even if one would have to ‘bite the bullet’ and accept that we would thus invalidate and undermine all criticism directed at games.

Common practice aside, there is a more fundamental problem with introducing the notion of responsibility, as it does not solve any of our issues. Bacharach and Tollefsen emphasize the importance of working as a body, so it looks as if responsibility is an *effect* of joint commitments, not a *cause* thereof. Likewise, Hick seems to imply that responsibility *follows* from the power to select and arrange content, yet again making responsibility a superfluous addition among the concepts of joint commitment and/or control. Moreover, Hick’s explanation is potentially circular: power to select content follows from responsibility, and responsibility follows from the power to select and arrange content.⁷⁹ A more charitable reading would be to see responsibility as *indicative* of authorial power.

⁷⁹ For criticism of Hick, see Killin (2015) and Bacharach and Tollefsen (2015).

This would free Hick's reasoning of circularity, but it still does not answer whether the player is an author, since the problem is displaced rather than resolved: instead of ascertaining whether players possess authorial power we now have to answer whether they should be held responsible for their gameplay.

Furthermore, the introduction of responsibility potentially makes matters even more complex and counterintuitive. A player can only select and arrange content in interactive parts of games but not text-segments or cut-scenes, and the designer would only be responsible for text and cut-scenes but not the player's actions and choices, so according to Hick's definition this would make games examples of *multiple* authorship. What looks like a unified narrative is actually a collection of ostensibly related segments, some of which are authored by the designer and some by the player, but this consequence is absurd; when we play a game we intuitively assume that both gameplay and cut-scenes narrate parts of the same story. Further, Hick himself says that a multiply-authored work has 'discrete, identifiable units' (2014, p.153), and since gameplay and cut-scenes make up a holistic unity a game can only have several coauthors or a single author, it cannot be an example of *multiple* authorship. One could instead argue that the player creates a new work in which she includes sequences originally authored by the designer, but that would make the player the *sole* author, not a coauthor, which in turn would lead to the same problems of intentions already discussed in chapter 3.

Hick suggests, similar to Livingston and Bacharach and Tollefsen, that one should distinguish between responsibility for a work's content and for the acts that lead to the creation of it (2015, p.340). For this reason, he argues that an editor may be the author of a *collection* of essays, but not of the essays themselves (Hick 2015, p.340n8). This explains why, for instance, a caterer is not an author, as

her responsibility does not extend beyond acts bringing about the film. As for players, they could assist in creating the game's narrative, but the designer is nonetheless responsible for its *content*. If responsibility is essential to and inseparable from authorship, and the player lacks responsibility, she also, *ex hypothesi*, lacks authority, meaning that game stories are not interactive. Game scholars could object that players *do* have responsibility for the content as well, including the cut-scenes, but this would be a question-begging assumption. A more fruitful approach would be to ascribe all responsibility for narrative content to the designer, meaning that she alone is the author of the game story.

In conclusion, I have shown that all definitions of coauthorship have their potential flaws, but regardless of which definition one chooses it is doubtful whether players can be called coauthors of video game stories as they do not seem to meet the necessary requirements. I have also shown that if one maintains that they *do*, the definition of coauthorship becomes so wide that it endows too many people with authorship.

4.2 The Conversation analogy

In the previous section I showed why players cannot be construed as coauthors, but there is another solution which could allow players to interact with video game stories nonetheless. Intentionalists often compare art and conversations, claiming that the reader 'converses' with the author by engaging with her work. In the following sections I adopt the intentionalist assumption that engagement with art has as its primary aim to uncover the actual author's intentions. The question to be settled then is whether the conversation analogy is valid, and if so, whether it has different ramifications for video games than other media. If narratives in all media are like conversations where both parties can contribute in a reciprocal

communicative act, it would mean that *all* narratives are interactive. If the analogy only holds for video games it could make games more interactive than novels or films, but if it does not hold at all, not even video games could allow their recipients to be creators. I begin by outlining the conversation analogy, and in the following two sub-sections I examine its strengths and weaknesses.

4.2.1 Art as conversation

It is common to illustrate art interpretation by comparing it with conversations (Carroll 1992, pp.117-18, 2002, p.321; Westphal 2002, p.26; Dickie and Wilson 1995, p.237; Dickie 1997, p.311; Livingston 1998, p.835, 2005, p.96; Stecker 2005, p.146, pp.156-7, 2008, p.42; D. Davies 2007, p.86; Maes 2008, p.89; Fernflores 2010, p.62). Similar comparisons have been made with reference to game design (Pearce 2004a, p.152). Intentionalism has been defended with claims that interpreting a work is like having a conversation with the author, or at least that interpreters have the same interest in discovering the utterer's meaning as one does in a conversation (Carroll 1992, pp.117-18, 1997a, pp.307-8, 2000, pp.81-2, 2002, p.323, 2011, p.132; Iseminger 1996, p.324; Leddy 1999, pp.222-3; Irwin 2002, p.202n16; Nathan 2005, pp.35-7; Sellors 2007, p.264; Stecker 2008, p.42; Mikkonen 2009; Maes 2010, p.124; Stock 2017, pp.33-4). Similar views are not unique to actual intentionalists, but can also be used, if only figuratively, by those who deny that meaning is defined by the *actual* author's intentions (Trivedi 2001, p.194; Currie 2004, p.119).

Comparisons between art and conversations have been criticized on the grounds that engagement with artworks and conversations differ in crucial ways, the general point being that the activities are engaged in with different goals achieved with different means (such as the interest in the style and form of an artwork) and/or that some artforms lack an equivalent to the conventional meaning

found in language (Beardsley 1992, p.33; Levinson 1992, p.223, p.241; Rosebury 1997, pp.25-6; Wilson 1997, pp.309-11; Lamarque 2002b, pp.288-9, p.299; Currie 2003, p.298, pp.303-4, 2004, pp.111-12, p.119; Kiefer 2005, p.273; Livingston 2005, p.151; Nathan 2005, p.43; Stecker 2005, p.147, 2006, pp.429-32, 2008, p.42; S. Davies 2006, p.228; Dickie 2006, p.80; Mikkonen 2009; Maes 2010, p.124; Huddleston 2012, p.247, p.255; Levinson 2016, p.142; Stock 2017, pp.67-8). Some go as far as claiming that divining the utterer's meaning is not even the primary/exclusive goal in *conversations* (Rosebury 1997, pp.15-16; Kiefer 2005, p.277; Dickie 2006, p.73; Huddleston 2012, p.253). Another objection is that a person's interaction with an artwork can hardly be called a conversation: by reading a book one does not really converse with the author, and in cases where the artist and recipient are both present (e.g. the performance of a theatre play) artistic conventions differ from conversational ones, for instance in how they prevent the audience from communicating with the performer (Rosebury 1997, p.26; Wilson 1997, p.311; Currie 2004, p.111, p.127; Livingston 2005, p.151; Kiefer 2005, pp.273-4, p.277; Dickie 2006, p.80; Stecker 2006, p.433; Trivedi 2015, pp.705-6; Levinson 2016, p.142; Stock 2017, p.90). Differences between conversations and artworks have been acknowledged to some extent by actual intentionalists, and although they diverge in opinions on the utility of the analogy, they nevertheless emphasize the authority of the creator (Carroll 1992, pp.117-18; Livingston 2005, pp.151-2; Stecker 2006, p.433; Stock 2017, p.95).

There are two scholars who explore this argument in more depth. Andrew Huddleston criticizes Carroll's defence of the conversation analogy and asserts that because of the one-dimensional nature of engagement with artworks one does not converse *literally* with an author, which leads him to the conclusion that if Carroll's defence is to be cogent, Carroll 'would need to find a way of construing the encounter between author and reader that makes it *interactive enough* to

warrant being thought of in conversational terms' (Huddleston 2012, p.248; original emphasis). He also notes that by reformulating interpretative endeavours to render them sufficiently interactive so as to respond to accusations of one-dimensionality, one risks diverging from the actual intentionalist's approach to interpretation (Huddleston 2012, p.248). It would follow, he explains, that any contribution from the reader not corresponding to the author's intention would be 'hermeneutically inappropriate' and irrelevant to the work-meaning, which hardly merits being called a conversation (Huddleston 2012, p.249-50). Huddleston's solution is not to refute Carroll's conception of the conversation analogy entirely, but to regard an encounter with the text as a 'meta-level discussion' with the author about the optimal interpretation. Huddleston retains the intentionalist goal of uncovering the author's intentions – doing otherwise, he says, would preclude possibilities of having a metaphorical conversation – but suggests that this is not the end of our interpretative endeavour, and he adds the step where we respond with our own interpretation (2012, pp.250-1). This need not amount to a deliberate misunderstanding of the actual author's intentions, he explains, because actual conversations do not consist exclusively of uncovering the speaker's intention; instead, one may make suggestions of improvements whilst fully aware of what the interlocutor actually meant, such as when a professor has a 'meta-level conversation' with a student on how an essay could be interpreted and/or improved (Huddleston 2012, p.252n28, p.253). Huddleston explains that discovery of the student's initial intentions is not the ultimate goal, but to 'come up with a good interpretation of the ideas in the essay, even when that construal goes beyond what the student first meant' (2012, p.253), which he asserts is equivalent to the reader's suggestion of an interpretation different from the author's intentions. He is also sceptical of how Carroll's application of the conversation analogy seems to have evaluation of an artwork and the artist's achievement as its

goal, and of how Carroll does not provide a satisfactory defence of why this *should* be the goal of interpretation, arguing that it seems odd to presume that this would mirror the goal of conventional conversations (Huddleston 2012, pp.254-5).

Anthony Jannotta objects that Huddleston's view builds on a misunderstanding of Carroll's conception of the conversation analogy. Jannotta explains that Carroll does not defend interpretation as exclusively uncovering the intentions of the author; other interests should not be replaced by but reconciled with conversational interests, and when the artistic intentions are discovered the interpretative activity does not stop, one has to 'work with' said intentions (2014, p.373). Jannotta shows this with reference to Carroll's assessment of *The Mysterious Island* (Verne, 1874): Carroll's interpretative activity is not finished when he has ascertained Verne's intentions, he uses these intentions to reach an interpretation 'opposed diametrically to the one Jule Verne intended' (Jannotta 2014, p.374). Drawing on Carroll, Jannotta argues that 'interpretation need not end with the identification of the creator's intentions (that is the starting place) and [...] interpreters can bring their independent interests, ideas, or agenda to bear on the artwork (so long as they work with rather than ignore those intentions)' (2014, p.374). He asserts that the conversation analogy as presented by Carroll cannot be reduced to a monologue: Carroll complies with the interpretive policy of discovering the intentions of the author, but this does not mean that his 'conversation' with Verne becomes less open and mutual (Jannotta 2014, p.374). Jannotta is aware of the fact that Verne cannot answer, but he nevertheless maintains that the communication is mutual, open, and interactive, since Carroll's interpretation is independent and diverges from the one intended by the author (2014, p.374).

Jannotta further argues that Huddleston's monologue objection is not successful since it builds on the assumption that comparisons with conversations

cannot be reconciled with constraints imposed by artistic intentions, and claims that his own conception of an intentionalist metaphorical conversation is both mutual and open, meaning that intentionalists can still compare interpretation to a conversation (2014, p.376). He contends that Huddleston's meta-level conversation is not necessarily superior to the conversation analogy, since the latter satisfies the same requirements to the same extent (Jannotta 2014, pp.376-7).

Jannotta also criticizes Huddleston's meta-level dialogue since Huddleston's analogy about a professor and a student concerns instruction on how to *improve* a given work, whereas an interpretation is concerned with *clarifying* it (Jannotta 2014, p.379, 379n35). Jannotta's view is that the interpreter works with artistic intentions whilst incorporating her own interests, and that intentionalists can appeal to the conversation analogy insofar as the meta-level dialogue is a 'cooperative attempt between artist and interpreter to arrive at the best interpretation' (2014, pp.379-80).

To reiterate the questions relevant for this section: is the conversation analogy appropriate in video game interpretation? If so, does it have different ramifications for video games than other media, which render video game stories interactive? I first scrutinize the general validity of the conversation analogy before moving on to whether it is valid when applied to video games. These questions are crucial for the interactivity of video game stories, because if the conversation analogy allows for stories in other media to be interactive, video games are not unique, and if the conversation analogy is fundamentally flawed it may not be able to support interactivity in any medium, let alone video games.

4.2.3 Moderate intentionalism and the conversation analogy

Huddleston speaks only of cases where artistic intentions are successfully

realized, and therefore neglects a crucial difference between EAI and MAI: MAI allows for passages with unintended meanings, where authorial intentions are either absent or not realized, possibly making the conversation more mutual (since the 'conversation' with the artist would not be limited to understanding authorial intentions). In games, this would mean that players could add content through gameplay as long as it is not contrary to the designer's intentions. A consequence of this, however, is that the same reciprocity that allows for artworks to be more like mutual conversations also entails that games are not fundamentally different from other media, since readers/spectators are *also* allowed to 'speak their minds'.

Does this mean that MAI turns readers/spectators into contributors to the same extent as players? No. Although Huddleston does not elaborate on this, his allegations do apply to both EAI and MAI in the sense that this conversation would ultimately be just as one-sided, but what Huddleston does not realize is that according to MAI it would also be futile. Not only does the artist have no way of correcting our interpretations, MAI readily admits that parts of the artwork do not successfully convey artistic intentions. According to EAI we have nothing to add to the artist's monologue; according to MAI, we have nothing to add *and* we most likely misunderstand some intentions because of the monologue's deficient conveyance of them. Furthermore, since MAI concedes that some meanings are not intended by the author, we have to 'leave' the conversation whenever we interpret passages not conveying artistic intentions and instead direct our attention to the linguistic meaning the author did *not* intend, which defeats the very purpose of having a conversation. If a person misspeaks and cannot clarify what she meant we do not direct our attention exclusively to the linguistic meaning of her utterance regardless of what it conveys, we still try to grasp what she attempted to communicate. If the designer failed to implement something in the game the player would not therefore be able to add any content of her own, but would have to

'make do' with what ended up in the game contrary to the designer's intentions. Ultimately this means that Huddleston's criticism still obtains, but for reasons he fails to acknowledge: MAI potentially opens up for a conversation, but a deficient and pointless one.

4.2.4 One-dimensionality of interpretation

Moreover, the problem of one-sidedness does not reside, as Huddleston implies, in the focus on one person's intentions, but in the inherent limitations of interpretive activities: a crucial problem with the conversation analogy is that literary/cinematic narratives do not allow for any genuine reciprocity. Huddleston's point is that readers only focus on the author's intentions, mine is that they could not do otherwise.

Jannotta contends that the 'conversation' is already mutual; as an example he mentions how Carroll replies to Verne by presenting his own interpretation. This sounds, in principle, like what Thabet says about the player being able to produce a counter-discourse as a response to the one presented by the game, which indicates that the conversation analogy is appropriate in video games. However, this hardly seems like a *mutual* conversation, because if fictional truth is determined by artistic intentions, Carroll's reply is no more than a mere rejection of the intended (and, *ex hypothesi*, correct) interpretation. Verne presents a story he intended to be anti-racist, Carroll replies that he does not think it is; this is not a conversation as much as a monologue and an unheard rejoinder. If there is a fictional truth independent of artistic intentions, and there is a clear discrepancy between the two, the conversation is no less futile than before: Verne erroneously thinks that his story is anti-racist but Carroll replies that it is not. This is a conclusion Carroll must reach *before* 'speaking' to Verne, and the story remains racist regardless of whether Verne is informed about it; Carroll's reply does not

alter the truth-value of any fictional proposition, and therefore does not render the 'conversation' mutual.

Initially it may seem as though the conversation analogy obtains in video games in a way different from other media: the designer presents a narrative and players can offer interpretations through gameplay. However, the aforementioned argument still applies. Suppose we played a game with content we find repulsive. Players may object to this content (perhaps by ceasing to play), but the designer does not hear or respond. This is no more a conversation than the example with Verne and Carroll.

Nevertheless, the example with Carroll and Verne is too limited, as it focuses only on *moral* aspects of a narrative. Whether *Mysterious Island* is racist depends on how we relate fictional propositions to actual moral doctrines, which is beyond the assessment of fictional truth. As opposed to the moral dimension of a fiction, when speaking of fictional truth it could be argued that games are more conversational. In a novel/film the author/director tells us what occurs, but in a game like *Ocarina of Time* the designer may suggest what Link should do and the player suggests what should happen by controlling him. There is a full exchange, and the mutuality is preserved.

The same problems reappear, however, insofar as the player is limited by the designer's intentions in the same way that Huddleston argues that the reader is limited by the author. For instance, in one mission of *Perfect Dark* the player has to accomplish certain tasks before reaching a lift where a cut-scene is played, marking the end of the mission. Should the player enter the lift without having carried out all tasks, the cut-scene will not play and the mission will not end. Thus, the player may offer her own interpretation and the designer rejects it indirectly by programming the game in such a way that it cannot be realized. If anything, this mutual communication makes games even *less* open, since the programmer

actually does respond indirectly by rejecting 'incorrect' interpretations. If the designer does not endow the player with the power to 'speak her mind' we could hardly call it a conversation.

A more fundamental problem is that one does not actually *speak* with the author. Like Huddleston, Jannotta is aware that the author 'can offer no rejoinder' (2014, p.374), but he maintains that this nevertheless constitutes a full exchange satisfying the demand for mutuality and openness. Jannotta could have been right, had Verne actually heard what Carroll said. If Carroll answers Verne, we do not need Verne to comment upon Carroll's reply; requiring every utterance to be commented upon in order to satisfy the conditions of openness and mutuality would lead to an infinite chain of comments and replies. The problem here, however, is that Jannotta has rather low requirements for his definition of a 'full exchange'; Verne, being absent, cannot offer a rejoinder, raising the question of how this counts as a conversation. The conversation analogy has been criticized for such reasons, that the so-called conversation is more of a monologue (Wilson 1997, p.311; Dickie 2006, p.80; Huddleston 2012, p.249). Even if Verne had been present, it has been argued that artists may not comment upon the work and/or adjudicate between interpretations once it is finished, that it should speak for itself (Rosebury 1997, p.26; Levinson 2016, p.142). What Carroll does is to *react*, he does not respond, and if a hypothesized reaction counts as a response it becomes unclear when we do *not* converse with someone. Likewise, a player who thinks of ways of improving a game does not respond to the designer's 'monologue' that is the game, but merely reacts with a hypothetical reply which is not uttered. Huddleston (and others) seems to be right in the objection that if the interpretation of a novel is a kind of conversation, it is a unidirectional kind of communication. Readers and spectators have no means of communicating with the author or director, nor can a player communicate with the designer, so they are, in this

sense, passive recipients. The activity of readers and spectators can be underestimated – interpretive endeavours can require great efforts – but it is important to distinguish between *activity* and *reciprocity*: the fact that readers and spectators are engaged on a cognitive level when attempting to decipher the meaning of a work is unrelated to the extent at which they are allowed to *contribute* to said meaning.

4.2.5 Meta-conversation

Does this mean that we can retain the conversation analogy by ‘converting’ it into a meta-conversation in the way Huddleston does? Jannotta even admits that Huddleston’s meta-conversation is inescapable to some degree, since our comments will be *about* the artwork (2014, p.380). It is correct that any conversation with an artist will be a meta-conversation since the work is the object of conversation, not the means through which a conversation is held; writing on a novel’s pages or inserting images on a film-strip will not elicit a response from the creator. One can compare it to mail-correspondence, where replying to a letter is a kind of conversation but a letter commenting upon the content is more of a meta-conversation. The difference between a conversation and a meta-conversation can be distinguished if we imagine a third person and what she cannot say in response to the given letter which its intended recipient *can*; the third person can only speak of the given letter as an object in a meta-conversation, but not engage in the conversation herself, as its content is not directed at her.

However, this does not mean that the meta-conversation is a better model, because we are still unable to communicate with the author for practical and/or conventional reasons: even if she were physically present she may still refuse to answer (since it would be an inappropriate engagement with the work). Like Jannotta, Huddleston is aware of this limitation, but he defends it by saying that ‘at

least on this construal of the conversation metaphor, our voices, as it were, stand a chance to be heard, when it comes to the interpretation to be given' (2012, p.251). In which way our voices are heard is left unexplained, so the conversation analogy seems to be renamed, not improved. Huddleston and Jannotta attempt to solve the problem in almost identical and therefore equally deficient ways. Like the conversation analogy, Huddleston's meta-conversation has no full exchange and therefore no mutuality insofar as our reply consists of what we would like to say but are unable to communicate. Nothing is changed by Huddleston's addition of the prefix 'meta'.

Even if we accept Huddleston's analogy of the professor and the student we still would not influence the fictional truth, but not entirely for the reason presented by Jannotta. As already mentioned, Jannotta objects that the professor's instructions are not analogous to an interpretation as they aim at improving content, not illuminating it, but Jannotta does not elaborate enough on this point. Huddleston sees an interpretation as 'an attempt to make sense of the work's features' (2012, p.245), which raises the question of what purpose a meta-conversation serves and indicates that Jannotta is right in his objection (a meta-conversation is not an interpretation), because suggesting how to improve a work *presumes* comprehension of the work, it does not ameliorate it. Whilst playing we may try strategies we think would improve the game, but whether they can be carried out is up to the designer.

Moreover, we can connect this specific criticism to one offered by Currie, directed at intentionalism in general. Huddleston is right to say that our own contributions are hermeneutically inappropriate, but he does not realize how irrelevant such a discussion is. As mentioned earlier, Currie argues that when we look for the artist's intentions, we are seeking a hypothetical work which the author failed to create, insofar as authorial intentions deviate to some extent from the

completed work. Similarly, if we engage in a meta-conversation about a work, we do not speak of the actual work, but a hypothetical one which we would have wanted instead. Thus, a crucial problem here is that such a meta-discussion not only has a different goal than 'genuine' interpretations (amelioration instead of comprehension/evaluation), it also concerns a different work (a hypothetical one, not the actual one), and therefore has no bearing on the truth in the given fiction, nor our comprehension of it, but rather presupposes both. Jannotta criticizes Huddleston for focusing too much on the aesthetically best interpretation and says that the interpreter 'can always dream up a more pleasing interpretation' (2014, p.377),⁸⁰ but his criticism focuses too much on Huddleston's potential aesthetic maximization. Huddleston asserts that aesthetic value need not be our primary interest, and mentions cognitive and moral goals as reasons for diverging from artistic intentions (2012, p.244n11), so Jannotta's criticism may be void. A more problematic aspect of this value maximization is not that it disrespects the artist's intention, but that it neglects fictional truth altogether, putting interpreters in a position where they allow the artist to 'speak' as long as it pleases them but discard anything they dislike without cooperating with the speaker (since the artist cannot reply to the interpreter's comments). This flaw, however, permeates both Huddleston's and Jannotta's lines of reasoning.

More importantly, regardless of whether we endorse the conversation analogy or Huddleston's meta-conversation, it would still have no bearing on truth in fiction, and in this respect mutuality is compromised even further in both Huddleston's and Jannotta's models. Even if we were able to converse with the author in Huddleston's meta-conversational way, that would only make the *meta-conversation* mutual, because it is only there a reader/spectator can get some kind

⁸⁰ Stock similarly objects to selecting an interpretation on the grounds that it is morally pleasing (2017, p.101).

of response, but if we accept the intentionalist definition of truth in fiction (i.e. equating fictional truth with the intentions of the creator at the time of creation), it follows that the only thing that changes as a result of this conversation is our understanding of the fictional truth, not the fictional truth as such; we can never influence the intentions Fleming had when writing the Bond-novels, so the fictional truth, being equivalent to those intentions, remains unaltered.

4.2.6 Independence and relevance of interpretations

Jannotta further criticizes Huddleston's conception of an independent interpretation for not being clearly defined and implying that independence is assessed in terms of its relevance to artistic intentions, running the risk of making an independent interpretation both non-intended and irrelevant (2014, pp.375-6, p.376n22). This means that the 'independence of an interpretive claim is presumably a matter of degree, with the slavish reporting of artistic intentions at one extreme and the unrestrained imposing of one's own ideas at the other. Huddleston does not indicate where on the continuum his view falls' (Jannotta 2014, p.376n22). Jannotta contends that if an interpretation needs to be unrelated or irrelevant to artistic intentions in order for the conversation to be open it would mean that open conversations consist of non sequiturs (2014, p.376). Jannotta, on the other hand, asserts that contributions made to a conversation are usually related/relevant to what the other person said (2014, p.376). Jannotta further contends that Huddleston's model is too competitive, whereas Jannotta himself emphasizes how the artist and interpreter cooperate (2014, pp.379-80).

Jannotta is right, because neither slavish reporting of the author's intentions nor unrestrained imposing of one's ideas would count as a conversation. One problem is that by examining each conjunct of a given conjunction that make up an interpretation the complexity and fluidity of interpretations vanishes, along with the

possibility of creating independent interpretations still relevant to the artist's intentions. Hence, there is no cooperation à la Jannotta, but rather competition à la Huddleston. To illustrate why an interpretation cannot be both independent and relevant, take the interpretative claim that, in the Harry Potter-books, Dumbledore is heterosexual, a claim to which Rowling objects, saying that he is not. This would not qualify as an example of a conversation where the reader has worked with the author's intentions to produce an independent interpretation not disconnected from authorial intentions, because our interpretation $F(p)$ ⁸¹ and the authorial intention $F(\sim p)$ are mutually exclusive. This illustrates how Jannotta's suggestion of 'working with' intentions does not differ in principle from the practice he criticizes himself: if an interpretative proposition is to be independent of but related to the artist's intentions the only option is for it to be opposed to these intentions; in other words, if the artist's intention is $F(\sim p)$ ours would have to be $F(p)$ (or one of the other two options). Since Jannotta renounces unrelated interpretations promoting non sequiturs we cannot avoid this issue by formulating an interpretative statement which does not decide on $F(p) \vee F(\sim p)$, but the only remaining option is no more appealing, as it would amount to opposing/ignoring authorial intentions.⁸² The only possible response would be for Jannotta to outline to what extent and in which aspects an interpretation may deviate from the author's intentions whilst still remaining relevant to them (so the interpreter works with rather than ignores authorial intentions), but since each interpretative proposition can be approached as a dichotomy – i.e. $F(p) \vee F(\sim p)$ – we lose the interpretative 'leeway' which would create the continuum to which Jannotta appeals. This applies equally across the

⁸¹ We could also state $\sim F(\sim p)$, i.e. it is not fictionally true that Dumbledore is not heterosexual, or potentially $\sim \sim F(p)$, i.e. it is false that it is not fictionally true that Dumbledore is heterosexual. My argument does not hinge on which specific alternative one endorses, as long as it contradicts the author's intention.

⁸² Jannotta does address the problem of how moderate intentionalists are to treat interesting interpretations not intended by the author, but does not go into detail on how to resolve this matter (2014, p.380n36).

arts, but in games our interpretative limitations are all the more palpable. In novels and films interpreters can think of an interpretation contrary/unrelated to the author's/director's intention (the novel/film does not control their imagination), but interaction in games is limited by parameters implemented by the designer; players cannot play in a way contrary to the designers intentions, nor in a way completely unrelated to them, since the game's code simply does not allow for it.⁸³

If we instead evaluate a given interpretation holistically, judging all interpretative propositions together in a single conjunction, Jannotta would have to answer which of the conjunction's constituents may deviate from authorial intentions, to what extent, and what determines these matters. If the interpretation is permissible because the author approves of interpretative propositions that diverge from her intentions we end up with a monologue with an almighty author regardless, since authorial intentions ultimately control the interpretation insofar as they restrict interpretative liberties: in vague passages the author can intend the readers to fill in details, but they can only do this once they have assured themselves that this was intended by the author. However, this does not necessarily grant us any creative power, as both actual and hypothetical intentionalists have argued that a proposition is not true in the fiction only because we imagine it (Currie 1990, p.72; Stock 2017, p.103).

George Wilson has criticized Carroll for not explaining how authorial intentions constrain interpretations (1997, p.310), and the same criticism applies to Jannotta: his distinction between working with and uncovering intentions is spurious. Jannotta seems to agree with Huddleston that an open conversation 'involves taking seriously the ideas of those participating in the conversation' (2014, p.374). How does Jannotta conceive of openness in a conversation? He

⁸³ Utilizing bugs and glitches in the code arguably count as opposing authorial intentions.

claims that Carroll's interpretation does not stop at uncovering the author's intentions, since he (Carroll) proceeds to create his own diametrically opposed interpretation (Jannotta 2014, p.374). Thus, interpreters can bring independent ideas insofar as they work with the intentions instead of ignoring them, but if Carroll's interpretation is diametrically opposed to Verne's intentions it is unclear to what extent he is still taking them seriously and working with them rather than ignoring them in order to produce something aesthetically superior. Further, Carroll's interpretation is hardly constrained by Verne's intentions if Carroll outright *rejects* them. If his interpretation on the other hand is constrained by Verne's intentions, it would lead to the above-mentioned paradox, i.e. that Carroll's interpretation is constrained by the intention insofar as Verne's intention was that one's interpretation should *not* be constrained by said intention.⁸⁴ Either way, readers/spectators/players either discover artistic intentions or create their own version, neither of which counts as a conversation.

Alternatively, it could be that the only interpretative propositions not refuted by the author are those with no bearing on central events and characters, yet it is hardly a conversation when the only matters one is allowed to speak of are of no importance. Moreover, this still leads to the aforementioned paradox: we may interpret the work in a way not intended by the author, because she intended us not to adhere to her intentions. We could also appeal to a fictional truth external from and independent of authorial intentions, but then we yet again abandon the project of conversing with the author.

Furthermore, it is questionable to what extent Carroll's reply counts as an interpretation. Jannotta criticizes Huddleston's analogy with the student and professor on the grounds that such a conversation has instruction as a goal, not interpretation (2014, p.379n35). Carroll's 'conversation' with the author, however,

⁸⁴ Nathan has also noted this paradox (2005, p.39).

does not differ in principle from that between the student and the professor, since Carroll does not illuminate the content anymore than the professor does. Carroll's reply is evaluative rather than instructive, and presupposes comprehension in lieu of leading to or altering it. In a conventional conversation, evaluating what a person says in this way does not count as a response to it.

Now that we have established the difficulty (if not impossibility) of creating a relevant, independent interpretation, it becomes more clear why games do not fare better as examples of open, mutual conversations, though they may give this impression. In many games, the designer allows the player to try a multitude of strategies with an immense variety, at least in terms of details. It does not matter exactly what players do, as long as they comply with the roughly outlined intention of the designer; when we encounter a group of enemies in *Vice City* it matters little in which order we kill them or which weapons we use. Thus, it seems as if games offer the player a chance to respond in a way that a reader/spectator cannot. However, from the fact that the designer has no *specific* intentions regarding a given (set of) fictional truth(s), it does not follow that she lacks intentions entirely, just that players are offered several options, all of which must be included by the designer. That is, instead of saying that the only legitimate interpretation is 'enemy X is killed before enemy Y' the designer communicates 'either X is killed before Y, or Y is killed before X.' By killing enemies in either of these possible orders players do not present their own interpretation, they merely accept one of the several options offered by the designer. The very same thing can be said about novels and films where vaguely outlined events offer many possible but equally valid interpretations.

There is, however, an aspect of gameplay that is more conversational in nature than anything to be found in novels and films. Modern games are often altered after release through the addition of updates that modify certain

parameters of the game. As flaws are discovered, the designer can 'converse' with players by correcting the 'utterance' that is the game, and so gameplay becomes more like a conversation. This, however, does not mean that games open up for a mutual, open conversation. On the contrary, the artist's control is reinforced, so players who successfully realize their 'interpretations' by playing in a certain way may be 'corrected' by the designer in the next update. Players may refuse to install the update in order to preserve the preferred interpretation/playthrough, but this would be to ignore artistic intentions in the very same way Jannota deems impermissible. Hence, there is no full exchange between players and designers except in the sense that players may offer numerous possible interpretations (by playing) until finally one is approved of by the designer. Thus, either a game is not updated, and then it is as much of a monologue as a novel or a film, or it *is* updated, making it even *less* of a conversation. Conversely, the player can alter the game's code and create so-called 'modifications' (or 'mods') where appearances and mechanics are different from the original version, but this is yet another kind of rejection of the game-author's intentions and a creation of an entirely new work, in principle no different from a reader adding his own pages to a book, or a spectator editing adding images to a film.⁸⁵

This cannot be resolved by renouncing intentionalism, because the consequence of doing so would only be that the author does *not* define truth in fiction, from which it does not follow that the reader *does*. Fictional truth would remain independent of the reader's interpretative activities, limiting readers to discovering a meaning they are in no position to influence. It is only by adopting value maximization that readers potentially get to speak their minds, but then we must also do away with the conversation analogy.

⁸⁵ Kania similarly argues that altering the code would be to violate the 'prescribed way' of engaging with the game (2018, p.188).

Ultimately, the conversation analogy does not allow for the interpreter to be more active in the creation of the story, not even in video games. The so-called conversation is more of a monologue where the designer has the final word and players converse in the sense that they attempt to find out the designer's intentions. The meta-conversation fares no better. It is still a monologue, but one where interpreters cherry-pick what they want and then construct something they find to be more appealing, and it mirrors common conversational practice to an even lesser degree than the 'conventional' conversation analogy.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have shown that although several game scholars contend that video games provide the interpreter (i.e. the player) with the opportunity to interact with the story in the sense that the player is able to alter fictional truth, video game stories are not fundamentally different from stories in other media. Naturally video games, as a medium, have their own unique properties, but these do not radically alter the nature of fictional truth; they allow for no more interaction on the part of the interpreter than do novels or films.

Temporality is one factor often cited by game theorists as a reason why games are more interactive, the argument being that game stories take place in the present, which I have called the Claim of Presentness (or CoP). I have shown in the thesis that advocates of the CoP provide no good reason to assume that temporal properties of video game stories differ from those of novels and/or films. One reason cited in defence of the CoP is that the temporality of the representation and that of the story are automorphic, i.e. that the presentness of the representation purportedly conveys the presentness of the story, but it is arbitrary to posit this only with regards to video games and no other media. This assumption is not even valid in real life, as some real events display a discrepancy between their metaphysical properties and the visual experience of them, such as the experience of seeing stars that disappeared long ago, where the present visual experience is of a past event; if one cannot assume that presentness of the visual experience correlates with presentness of a real event, one certainly cannot do it in fiction. Moreover, this assumption becomes more counterintuitive when fictional content indicates that the story took place in the past, or when the representation itself shows obvious signs of coming from the past (e.g. aged special effects and

actors no longer alive in films, aged graphics in the case of games). The concession that any temporal property can potentially be conveyed by the representation undermines the assumption that presentness is the standard property conveyed by the narrative, and to assert that this is unique to games is question-begging.

I have also demonstrated that the CoP necessarily entails consequences neglected by game scholars, all of which weaken their claims. Firstly, if the CoP obtains, it would mean that flashbacks are impossible in game stories, as they would necessitate temporal relocation. It has been argued that games for this reason contain few flashbacks, but I have presented several examples of games where they are prevalent, and I have shown that flashbacks are not problematic as long as one does not adopt the CoP. I have also presented potential solutions that could make it possible to reconcile flashbacks with the CoP, but these were all shown to be deficient. A flashback could be seen as the memory of the narrator, but not all anachronies are associated with a character's act of remembering, and some could not possibly be memories (as when the person supposed to possess the memories is amnesiac). Even when a given flashback is a memory of a character, it is unlikely that its duration corresponds to that of the act of remembering, as this would mean that a game taking ten hours to play would entail that the character was talking uninterrupted for this length of time. A more fundamental problem is that if the narration is in the present, the flashback must convey *past* events, from which it follows that the player cannot interact with the events portrayed (since presentness is the very property allegedly making interaction possible). Another fundamental problem is that the CoP would render all anachronies impossible, so that a rearrangement of *scenes* would automatically entail a rearrangement of *events*, and I have argued that it would be arbitrary and counterintuitive to posit this only in relation to video games and no other medium,

given that this would entail that temporal relations between fictional events would automatically be altered if a video game narrative is conveyed in another medium.

Another problem entailed by the CoP is that it would require each game to be played only once in one continuous playthrough, since the temporal alignment between game story and real life would be disrupted if the game is paused. It would also lead to the paradox that if two players play the same game at different times, the same moment would be present for one player but past for another. It also introduces the question of why time does not pass in the fiction when we are not engaged with it. These problems could be resolved either by saying that each gaming-session, no matter how short, is its own story, alternatively that the fictional temporality is 'reset' at each gaming-session, but both solutions are counterintuitive and *ad hoc*: we are not prescribed to interpret game stories this way, and there is no reason why these solutions could not be applied to literary and cinematic narratives as well. It would also preclude the possibility of speaking of a playthrough as a single story, and would fragment it into an infinite number of stories instead.

Furthermore, if interaction requires that the game story take place in the present, it would entail that the duration of the story corresponds to the duration of the narrative – that the amount of time it takes for the story events to transpire is equal to the amount of time required by the narrative to convey them – since the fictional and actual present must move at the same speed. This phenomenon I called the Duration Assumption, and it is problematic for several reasons, the first one being that this principle has already been defended in cinema, where it has been shown to be prevalent but by no means necessary; fictional time is usually equivalent to narrative time, but there are numerous exceptions (slow- and fast motion probably being the most common ones). Secondly, it would require story time to move invariably in the same direction as narrative time, but there are

games which include segments played 'in reverse', which therefore refute this principle. Thirdly, several games include discrepancies between fictional time and narrative time, such as *Vice City*, where an in-game clock indicates that time passes sixty times faster in the fictional world than in reality, which would entail that fictional and actual time are only aligned briefly before the temporal discrepancy appears and grows incrementally. This discrepancy could potentially be resolved by stating that the progression of fictional time remains synchronized with actual time and that the difference lies in the use of temporal units (i.e. the term 'hour' denotes a shorter time-span within the fiction even though fictional time does not actually move faster), but that argument is refuted by games that use different temporal units for the same amount of time, such as when *Vice City* indicates that twenty actual seconds corresponds to both twenty fictional minutes and twenty fictional seconds. It also leads to odd consequences concerning the fictional world, e.g. that days only last for a matter of minutes, even though this is never mentioned in the fiction. Moreover, the Duration Assumption is made even more problematic by games where temporal manipulation is possible, allowing characters to speed up and/or slow down time and thus create a discrepancy between the rate at which narrative and fictional time progress. Ultimately it seems impossible to separate the CoP and the Duration Assumption, and since equal duration of the narrative and the story is a necessary consequence of the CoP, a refutation of the Duration Assumption by extension also refutes the CoP.

Finally I have refuted the very concept of a fictional present, i.e. of there being a moving, metaphysically privileged point in time. It is intuitive to presume that the fictional world resembles the real one, a principle that has been called the Reality Principle, so if there is an actual present there should be a fictional one as well. However, I have shown that one cannot presume that any property is shared by the fictional and actual world unless this is indicated by the fiction in question.

Moreover, if there is a metaphysically privileged point in time there has to be something which sets it apart from other points in time, and I considered whether the interactivity of the game would motivate and make it possible to locate such a point, i.e. if the interactive moment could be thought of as the present. I then presented four reasons why this conclusion is not viable.

First of all, the argument is circular: the moment of interaction is in the fictional present because the fictional present is the moment of interaction. Furthermore, one could also argue that the moment currently screened/read in a film/novel differs from other moments in that it is this moment which is currently represented, meaning that there is a fictional present in those media as well, which in turn entails that there is no significant difference between video games and other media.

Secondly, the possibility to return to previous parts of the game undermines any potential difference between various moments in the story and, by extension, any possible metaphysical privilege.

Thirdly, on a related note, there are interactive flashbacks in many games, and if interactivity is not limited to the present one cannot locate the fictional present only with reference to interactivity.

Fourthly, it is not possible to separate video games from film and literature in as clear-cut a fashion as is necessary for this argument, since many games contain both film-sequences and text-segments. If film and literature cannot possess the same temporal properties as video games, it would render most game stories unnecessarily complex and counterintuitive in terms of temporality, since their intermittent use of film and text would entail that sequences consisting of segments which seem to follow one another actually do not; a cut-scene following an interactive sequence would hence not depict events temporally posterior to those depicted by the interactive sequence, but actually events in the fictional

past, only because of purportedly inherent properties of the respective media, irrespective of the plausibility of this interpretation.

A more fundamental problem appears in narratives with anachronies, as there is no reliable way of ascertaining the temporal properties of any scene, save in relation to one another. If the first scene is temporally posterior to the second one, one can either claim that the first scene is a flash-forward or that the second one is a flashback, but these interpretations are equally plausible. Moreover, there is no reason why either of the scenes must be identified as the fictional *present*, one could just as well posit that both are located in the fictional past or future. If so, one cannot say that game stories are interactive, since presentness is a prerequisite for interactivity. In addition, our inability to ascertain the location of the fictional present translates, by extension, to an inability to assess whether the fictional timeline has a present at all. This inability becomes more evident in the light of the fact that A-series properties supervene on B-series properties, so that in narratives where the latter cannot be assessed – when we cannot say how fictional events are structured temporally in relation to one another – the mere existence of an A-series cannot be assessed either, let alone which A-series property is ascribed to which point in time. Said supervenience also shows the futility of speaking of A-series properties at all, seeing how B-series properties are sufficient for narrative comprehension. More importantly, even if there is a fictional present, it does not follow that it is ever represented, which would in turn obviate opportunities to interact with the story.

In the second half of the thesis I have shown that although many game scholars speak of the player as some kind of author, this conception is flawed and untenable. Both extreme and moderate actual intentionalism are problematic when applied to other media, and their issues and deficiencies become more salient and are aggravated when applied to video games. Since game scholars themselves

fail to expound intentionalistic theories, I have done so to show what alternatives are available and why they are flawed.

Extreme intentionalists argue that work-meaning is equivalent to authorial intentions, but I have shown that the requirements presented by them are problematic. If any conceivable content is sufficient in and of itself for the intentions to be realized we end up with so-called Humpty-Dumptyism, where an author can arbitrarily ascribe any meaning to any narrative content, and her intentions thus become infallible. One can instead argue that meaning obtains on the condition that the author can reasonably expect the interpreter to infer it, but this endows the author's expectations with too high an importance, possibly rendering a comprehensible narrative incomprehensible, not because of any flaws in the narrative, but because the author lacks the necessary expectation; it could also go back and forth between being comprehensible and incomprehensible depending on the author's expectations, in spite of remaining unchanged. Moreover, the issue of Humpty-Dumptyism persists, since an author producing a nonsensical work could still endow it with meaning, provided that she sincerely expects that it be understood by its recipients. One could add the caveat that such irrational agents are irrelevant exceptions, but this leads to the circular argument that agents are rational because they can be understood and that they can be understood because they are rational. Just as circular is the distinction extreme intentionalists make between *intending* and merely *wanting* a work to obtain a given meaning, where only the former results in endowing the work with a given meaning. The author is thus said to intend the meaning if it can be inferred, and if it cannot be inferred the author did not truly intend it, so authorial intentions once more become infallible, since all intentions will either be realized or discarded as mere volition (i.e. not intentions). If one accepts this definition, it follows that players cannot intend much when playing (especially not compared to what the

designer can intend), which in turn raises the question of why they should be considered authors at all.

The requirement for authorial intentions also creates several problems, such as potential gaps in the fictional truth following from the author's failure to form intentions regarding a given proposition. The fact that players lack intentions regarding most of the content in a game during their first playthrough exacerbates this problem, especially since much of what happens is contrary to their intentions (e.g. losing) which further reinforces the conception of the designer as author. Another problem is that the author may vacillate between intentions regarding work-meaning, which introduces the question of which intentions are meaning-defining and why. In games this problem is even more prevalent, seeing how players constantly revise their intentions throughout the playthrough.

It has been argued by intentionalists that one can utilize realized *instrumental* intentions in order to ascertain unrealized *ultimate* intentions, but this kind of interpretation presupposes knowledge about the ultimate intentions, and once more risks rendering the success-condition so minimal that authorial intentions become infallible; one could always refer to the last step to be realized in the chain of intentions and appeal to this as evidence of the ultimate intention.

Moderate actual intentionalism (MAI) does not fare better than the extreme kind. First of all, it is difficult to formulate criteria for when intentions obtain: mere compatibility is not sufficient, but by adding the criterion that intentions must enrich the text one excludes marginal but possible meanings whilst allowing for more absurd but unlikely ones.

According to one version of MAI, parts that do not correspond to the author's intentions are void of meaning, but this means that a passage may seem to be meaningful when, in fact, it is not (since authorial intentions are necessary for meaning to obtain). In games this problem is more acute, since the player's

intentions are less likely to be realized in games of a higher difficulty. This problem persists but is diminished considerably if the designer is regarded as the author.

MAI is also problematic when a work is ambiguous, insofar as authorial intentions are invoked to adjudicate between multiple possible meanings. If a work is ambiguous in the sense that its possible meanings are equally plausible and compatible with the work the author arguably failed to create the work she intended to, i.e. a work in which her intended meaning is the most plausible one, which in turn undermines the reason why her intention should be invoked to begin with. Further, by allowing for consultation of extratextual sources in order to verify her intentions the latter become infallible, since said sources in themselves make her intended meaning the most plausible one.

The use of partially realized intentions has its issues as well. By arguing that partial success only applies to the work as a whole one has to answer whether qualitative or quantitative success is the most important. If it is the latter, one has to specify how many intentions that have to be realized, but any number may seem arbitrary. If the evaluation is qualitative, one has to state which intentions are crucial for the realization of authorial intentions, but this is in itself an interpretative statement (which requires comprehension of the work), and this issue is rendered even more complicated by how some intentions in games cannot be realized if others are not; failure in an early part may prohibit realization of intentions pertaining to later parts. More generally, the interdependence of fictional propositions makes it difficult to evaluate them separately, since their importance emerges partially from their relations to other fictional propositions.

MAI has been criticized for advocating an arbitrary vacillation between work-meaning and authorial intentions: if the latter are not compatible with the former, the former obtains, but then authorial intentions seem superfluous. Video games introduce yet another, similar dichotomy, consisting of the player's and the

designer's respective intentions, where the former are invoked initially and the latter if the first ones do not obtain (and finally the work-meaning is invoked if both fail). Since player intentions are so fallible and transitory, it seems more worthwhile to focus exclusively on the designer's intentions, especially since she sets the limits for what the player can and cannot intend.

Finally, I have demonstrated that there is not much reason to believe that players are even *coauthors* of video game stories. By defining 'coauthor' as someone who was in any way involved in the production of the narrative one makes the notion too broad and neglects the artistic and aesthetic significance of each person's contribution. One could compare the player to an actor, but if an actor's performance does not change the fictional truth in a play, there is no reason to assume that the player's performance would do so in a game, instead of merely saying that some aspects are left indefinite.

Several scholars also note that being included in the production of a work is not sufficient for granting a person the status of author. If one person supervises others and has the authority to decide what is to be included in a work, she is the true author. With this definition in mind I argued that it is more reasonable to see the game designer as the author, because she sets up the limits within which players may act, and their volition cannot override hers.

The conclusion that the designer is the author is further reinforced by considering an artwork as an expression of the author's attitudes. A person may participate in the production of a work, yet one can argue that she is not an author insofar as her contribution aims at expressing someone else's attitudes. This is instantiated in gameplay where the player discovers and/or expresses the attitudes of the designer, but since this is not reciprocal – i.e. the designer does not also intend to convey the *player's* attitudes – the player is not an author, even if their attitudes happen to be identical. If their intentions diverge, it is the player

who has to yield to the intentions of the designer. Sometimes the player is offered much freedom in terms of what contributions to make, but to presume that this amounts to authorship remains question-begging.

Another conception of coauthorship emphasizes the importance of membership in the authorial group. Although this allows for coauthors to dissent on some matters without vitiating their authorship – whilst preventing a potential saboteur from becoming a part of the authorial team even if she believes that she shares the intentions of the coauthors – it leads to the awkward consequence that a person can be a coauthor regardless of what intentions she possesses and in spite of making no actual contribution. Membership in the authorial group seems neither necessary nor sufficient for making a person a coauthor; it appears rather to be a consequence of that person already being one.

Coauthorship can also be defined in terms of responsibility, but this would not allow players to be coauthors, since it is the designer who is held responsible for the game's content. Even if one were to argue that the player is responsible for her actions within the game, this can only apply to gameplay but cannot be extended to noninteractive parts, such as cut-scenes, which are exclusively the responsibility of the designer. This, however, would make most games incoherent, as gameplay and cut-scenes would be unrelated due to the fact that no single agent is responsible for both.

Related to questions of coauthorship is the so-called 'conversation analogy', that the interpreter 'converses' with the creator of a work through engagement with it. This analogy has primarily been applied to non-interactive media such as literature, and has been used by some to argue that the interpreter is not restricted to the interpretation intended by the author, but can enter a 'conversation' through which the meaning is altered. In the thesis this analogy is applied to video games. However, it is shown to be fundamentally flawed and not applicable in general – let

alone in the case of video games – from which it follows that the interpreter cannot alter fictional truth. The interactive nature of video games as a medium even works *against* any possible interaction with a game’s fictional truth in a more palpable fashion: the player may attempt to offer her own interpretation through gameplay, but the designer prevents any such alterations by programming the game in such a way that this gameplay is precluded.

Moreover, in all media the interpreter is able to articulate a potential response to the author, but this amounts to no more than a *reaction*; as the speaker never receives the response it would be more appropriate to call their communication a monologue, which prevents the listener from becoming an interlocutor. Even in artforms where the interpreter could potentially communicate her thoughts, artistic conventions mostly prevent her from doing so.

One proposed way of salvaging the conversation analogy is to conceive of interpreting as having a kind of ‘meta-conversation’; nevertheless, this fares no better than the conventional version, and differs from it primarily in name, not in nature. The author is still unable to receive the interpreter’s ‘reply’, and even if the interpreter does communicate with the actual author, the conversation has no bearing on the work’s fictional truth. It is questionable whether this would count as an interpretation at all, since it does not necessarily have as a goal to discover and comprehend the work’s meaning, but seems to be restricted to *amelioration* of the work (which *presupposes* comprehension of it). This in turn means that one has, in some sense, ceased to discuss the work in question and directed one’s attention to a hypothetical work one thinks the author *should have* made.

A more fundamental problem is that it is unclear what it would mean to ‘work with’ the intentions of the author to produce an interpretation independent of – but still relevant to – authorial intentions. For any given fictional proposition, the only way to make a relevant interpretation not identical to the one intended by the

author is to assume the inverse truth-value of that proposition, which would be to *oppose* authorial intentions, not work with them. Alternatively, one could conceive of an interpretation which does not treat propositions presented by the author, but this would render the interpretation irrelevant. In neither of these solutions does the interpreter make a relevant contribution; there is no cooperation, only competition and/or redundant additions. If the interpretation is to be judged holistically with all the propositions constituting it – instead of one proposition at a time – we get the problem of ascertaining which propositions may be altered in the interpretation, how many and to what extent, but that assessment would still be restricted by the intentions of the author, thus reducing the reciprocity of the purported conversation between her and the interpreter. In video games this ‘interpretative leeway’ may be comparatively broad, with numerous details varying from one playthrough to another, but the principle still stands, and all interpretations made by the player (through playing) have to be ‘assented to’ by the designer. In modern games, the conversational aspect is diminished further, since updates remove ‘interpretations’ discovered after the release of the game, and refusing to install said updates would amount to ignoring authorial intentions.

Future research

Scholars within both philosophy of fiction and game studies will be able benefit from the results of this thesis. Philosophers of fiction can build on my conclusions about time in fiction and examine temporal properties of stories and how fictional truth relates to time; my conclusions can potentially also contribute to philosophy of time in general, regarding questions of temporal metaphysical privilege and the relation between separate time-lines. Moreover, my conclusions regarding actual intentionalism – both moderate and extreme – are of value for discussions about these modes of interpretation in all media, as my discussions of authorial

intentions in video games illuminate their general and fundamental issues. Future research on the philosophy of games can also use my conclusions as a point of departure and/or develop them when examining topics overlooked by the thesis, such as hypothetical intentionalism, constructivism, pluralism etc.

Game scholars can also benefit from my results, and can relate conclusions presented here to their theories about the nature of game fiction. My conclusions regarding temporal aspects of games may be useful not only to scholars who discuss the temporality of games, but also scholars whose theories presuppose that games possess unique temporal properties. Furthermore, scholars whose theories relate to authorship in games may also find my conclusions useful when exploring this topic in further detail and in which ways authorship in games differs from other media. In general, all theorists who claim or imply that games are unique in terms of fictional truth may find the results presented here to be useful as these claims require a more cogent defence or, alternatively, have to be abandoned.

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Appendix – Key games discussed in the thesis

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

The evil wizard Ganondorf wants to take over the kingdom of Hyrule. Link, a young boy, must find a way to stop him from acquiring the Triforce, a relic which would grant Ganondorf an immense power. The player controls Link and must travel around Hyrule, battle monsters, find treasures, explore dungeons, and solve various puzzles. One noteworthy feature of the game is that the player can travel back and forth in time by visiting the Temple of Time; when Link travels forward in time, he wakes up as an adult, and by travelling back in time he 'reverses' back to a kid.

The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask

In this sequel to *Ocarina of Time*, Link reaches the land of Termina, which will be crushed by the moon in three days. Link once more has to explore the land and its dungeons, fight monstrous creatures, and solve puzzles in order to save the kingdom. Similar to *Ocarina of Time*, time travel is integrated into the story: Link can travel back in time, and has to relive the same three days over and over and complete all tasks necessary for stopping the moon from destroying the kingdom.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Tommy Vercetti has just been released from prison and is sent to Vice City by his boss to carry out a drug deal. The deal goes wrong and Tommy loses the drugs and the money, and has to get both back to please his infuriated boss. He makes many acquaintances in the criminal underworld and slowly acquires more money and power. Most missions concern various kinds of criminal activities, for instance

assassinations, illegal street racing, blackmail, assault, delivering drugs, etc. The player decides when to start a given mission, and when not currently on a mission she is free to roam the streets of Vice City.

Max Payne

NYPD detective Max Payne comes home one day to find his wife and daughter killed by drug addicts. Max infiltrates the mafia in order to find the person ultimately responsible for his loss and soon realizes that the murder of his wife involves some of the most powerful people in the city. The story is indebted to *film noir*, and employs tropes such as a stereotypical 'hard-boiled detective' narrating events through voice-over. The game is noteworthy because of a mechanic called 'bullet-time': the player has the ability to slow down time to such an extent that bullets can be seen and dodged. The majority of gameplay consists of gun-fights where the player is encouraged to utilize bullet-time as much as possible, resulting in stylized shoot-outs in slow-motion, making the game reminiscent of Hong Kong-action à la John Woo.

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

When the prince of Persia (whom I refer to as the Prince, as his name is never mentioned) loots the palace of an Indian Maharaja he finds the magical Dagger of Time and an hourglass containing the Sands of Time. When the hourglass is opened the sand turns everyone but the Prince himself to monsters, and he has to find a way to return the dagger to the hourglass and thus restore the kingdom and its inhabitants. The game alternates between battles with monsters and acrobatic traversal of various kinds of environments, where the Prince has to advance by jumping between pillars and platforms, climbing and/or running on walls, and bypassing deadly traps. The Dagger of Time endows the Prince with some control

of the flow of time and allows the player to, among other things, rewind time in order to rectify mistakes.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

A CIA-agent with the codename Naked Snake has to infiltrate military facilities in the Soviet jungle in order to stop scientists from building a tank equipped with nuclear weapons. The player is encouraged to adopt a stealthy approach and sneak past enemies when possible. If detected, she can resort to using firearms to kill guards if necessary, but can usually run away and avoid combat altogether.

Resident Evil 4

US government agent Leon S. Kennedy is sent to the countryside of an unnamed Hispanic country to save the president's daughter. It turns out that the farmers inhabiting the village have been turned into zombie-like creatures by a parasite, and are controlled by Saddler, a cult leader residing in a nearby castle. The player accesses a wide range of firearms and mostly has to kill zombie-villagers and various monsters.