



Prifysgol Cymru
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University of Wales
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A Study on How Cinematic Media Can Reinforce Audiences' Immersion and Investment to Subject Material

by

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Project submitted as part of the requirements for the
award of BA Games Design

April 2021

DECLARATION

I, Thomas Woodvine, declare that I am the sole author of this Project; that all references cited have been consulted; that I have conducted all work of which this is a record, and that the finished work lies within the prescribed word limits.

This work has not previously been accepted as part of any other degree submission.

Signed : Thomas Peter Woodvine

Date : 23rd April 2021

FORM OF CONSENT

I, Thomas Woodvine, hereby consent that my Project, submitted in candidature for the BA Games Design degree, if successful, may be made available for inter-library loan or photocopying (subject to the law of copyright), and that the title and abstract may be made available to outside organisations.

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Abstract of Study

This study discusses the visually cinematic approaches taken within film and digital game mediums, to evaluate how environment design can affect the topics presented by the creator (director or game developer), and how this assists immersion. Expanding on a basis of comprehension on the effects of environment design in alternate mediums and how audiences respond to visual techniques. Literature regarding the establishment of techniques in film medium and the contemporary methodology of film production is initially observed as a way of presenting the analysis material in the case studies. The studies apply existing theory and methodology on visual design, to support the analysis and summary.

Through the study it is established that video games with subject matter (explicitly surrounding unconventional topics, and existing cinematic genre) are competent at delivering immersive experiences through the techniques of traditional and cinematically visual design. This subsequently leads to the possible further branches of study on other aspects of immersive design through cinema and game media, specifically referencing the possibility of audible stimuli (shortly acknowledged in the case studies approached) and its contemporary advances in digital media (in comparison to traditional methods from film material and audio design theory).

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Introduction to the Continuation of Study

This project follows on from prior study into the field of immersion within alternative visual environments and what is the viewer's response to the immersive techniques employed. This continuation of study will move towards the use of cinematic techniques and, more specifically the ways in which compositional techniques can assist immersion through visual mediums. Expanding on analysis into how cinematic approaches in film may also benefit digital game settings or if these methods are already in use. This study will observe if they are effectively utilised in the development of audience immersion and should also result with conclusive understanding on the efficacy of cinematic techniques within the compositions of both film and digital environments. Whilst looking into how this enhances the audiences' immersion within the subject material (based on an existing understanding of immersive environments, from literature reviewal).

Aim of Study

To expand on the information gathered in prior research literature and to further understand the compositional methods. This study will centre on the core research question:

"How can cinematic media techniques reinforce audience immersion in diverse subject-material settings, and can it be implicated within digital environments?"

Completing Objectives

This will involve reaching an understanding of what techniques are used effectively to make a video game cinematic, in comparison to 'true' cinematic media. Through compiling a case study including examples of both cinematic and video game media, a comparison and analysis can be made, judging the methods which are utilised for visual compositions and their desired effect. This will lead into a follow up case study on further analysis of visual language and immersion within a contemporary example of the cinematically inspired game, Red Dead Redemption 2, and a comparison to the cinematic genre it depicts. To analyse the use of techniques, study will be conducted into the make-up of the Spaghetti Western subgenre to ensure that comparable statements can be made.

When providing analysis on the existing material, theory will be applied where appropriate, providing context and background to the techniques being observed. This analysis will explore the visually immersive aspects of the selected media and should reference the subject material narrative to deliver a more contextual analysis of the methods being implemented.

The following chapters will cover; the literature studied prior to this report, what research approaches will be taken for this study, as well as literature based on appropriate industry practises. After this, the study will lead onto the first of the two case studies and then end with a conclusive summary and reflection.

Review of Literature

Summary of Literature Studied



Figure 1 - Left, an example of traditional, immersive composition by Capability Brown (Rutherford, 2016).



Figure 2- Right, an example of emerging technology in the field of digital immersion (Hamilton, 2020).

To establish a proposal for this subject of study, appropriate research and theory was observed, prior to this continuation of research. As a result, a basis of knowledge surrounding immersive environments was obtained. The literature involved the understanding of key sensory principles which audiences utilise, when engaging with artistic media and how contemporary methods can enhance this sense of immersion. The literature also compared contemporary methods alongside traditional

compositional techniques, in order to garner an appreciation of the applicability of visual design methods within real-world, digital and cinematic mediums.

Sensory Focus of Immersion

The importance of visually tactile imagery was established from research on the connection between the two senses, sight and touch. Observance of a scientific study into this matter, provided emphasis on the immediate 'tactile association' of imagery and the close mental connection of visual stimuli to the sense of tactility. It was therefore established that the clarity of visual composition is an essential technique to enhancing the viewer's immersion and their perception in any environment.

In terms of real-world tactile environments, the works of landscape designer, Capability Brown (Born Lancelot Brown, 1716-1783), were considered due to his use of compositional techniques and how the audience interacted with the environment, presented to them through Brown's picturesque design style, which involved guiding the viewer through a country park via compositional direction. The advantage of this creative medium is its basis in a physical environment and the utilisation of all five sensory stimuli (obviously culminating to a completely immersive environment due to the viewer's presence within it). This research surrounding real-world design provided background for the alternative, visual effects, used in contemporary media and whether they achieve similar immersive standards through composition or other methods.

Emerging Immersive Hardware

Through the analysis of this literature, it was found that contemporary techniques, regarding Virtual Reality and haptic feedback, are effective apparatus in the development of environments which provide practical uses, such as training and recovery for patients experiencing certain traumas within the field of health rehabilitation. Going forward, VR has recently gained success in the commercial market due to current technological capabilities (compact processing power and screen resolution) and with further advancements it is feasible to predict that it will eventually be capable of reaching a standard of which fulfils the audiences' sensory immersion in terms of a tactile environment.

A fundamental level of knowledge respecting new, immersive methods was achieved through the observation of contemporary and emerging VR-Haptics based technologies. Through this understanding it was established that due to the recentness and lack of commercial availability, this branch of digital media platform and hardware does not yet provide enough existing independent studies or review on whether this style of immersive delivery is currently sustainable. However, the majority of haptics hardware is currently being developed, either through third parties or leading, technology corporations.

Result and Continuation of Study

Due to the lack of substantial literature on emerging VR technology, the study would ultimately continue towards more traditional methods in tackling how immersion and tactility is conveyed through film-based media. This was approached through a short, explanatory summary between game visuals and mise en scene principles. An example was used to provide evidence towards the possibility of integrating cinematic approaches within game environments. Red Dead Redemption 2 (Rockstar Games, 2018) presented environments which clearly represented motifs seen in the previously established subgenre, the Spaghetti Western and existing representations of Westerns in cinematic mediums.

This genre was chosen due to the gritty and authentic mise en scene used in many compositions from Western and Spaghetti Western film catalogues. The emphasis on 'realistic' mise en scene allows for the films to achieve the sense of tactility and kinetic atmosphere, providing clear grounds for a comparison towards how this is achieved with the subject material in a digital medium, and would need to take place in a broader continuation of study. Studying how a digital environment uses visual techniques and compositions to develop an immersive setting within already established subject material.

Research Methodology

Research will be conducted through the development of two case studies, which will focus on alternate subject material such as tone and feel, narrative and setting. Analysis will be made through a comparative assessment of existing media for both film and video game mediums. The media selected for the initial case study will focus on one game and one film, associated by subject material. The second case study will continue from the conclusion of the literature review and further explore the commonalities of a cinematic experience in Red Dead Redemption 2 with the comparative film genres (Western and its Spaghetti Western subgenre). This analysis of material will mainly attain to comprehending environment and set design, as this is the core focus established in both the literature review and overall study aim.

Within the case studies a visual analysis of the media will be carried out, to ensure that the study thoroughly investigates the implementation of cinematic techniques, what style of techniques are present within the game media, and what does the cinematic language achieve in context with environment focused immersion. To clarify the effectiveness of the observances made in the comparison, theory will be used surrounding, form and function, composition, cinematic language and game design. The element of audio-based stimuli will also be considered within these studies, as immersion within both forms of the media are dependent upon the relationship of image and sound, therefore sound will be partially acknowledged through audio-visual study.

To bolster the comprehension of cinematic techniques, and to underline how filmmakers can sometimes utilise methods concerning digital post-production. Initial research will be implemented for background evidence surrounding an area on design

techniques and processes, in which film and game design style methods may overlap. This information will provide better insight to industry practises when considering the existing media in the following case studies and consideration into how the methods of the two mediums may advance in the future. This section of research will provide a timeline of events summary, as to ensure that enough relevant information is provided for reference and to attribute to the analysis within the case studies.

Analysis of Existing Subject Media

Timeline of Background Techniques for Film Environments

Multiple Exposure (Established- Early 1900s)

Méliès (1861-1938) is widely regarded as the 'father of special effects', due to his background in visual illusions, he later transferred these skills to early filming technologies and developed the multiple exposure technique. The effects employed in his films would allow for the early influx of film media, to branch out to more fictitious, imaginative and surreal subject matter (seen in French and German expressionist film movements, in the early 20th century).

"Multiple exposure (surimpression) involved filming, re-ranking back to the point at which filming initially began, and then filming over the already exposed stock. Melies used a metronome to make sure he turned the crank at a consistent speed... so as to go back over the same length of film when re-exposing it. This technique was used to produce several different effects, including dissolves, superimposition... a 'replication effect' and transparencies".

-Ezra, 2000, p. 29

Matte Paintings (Established- Early 1900s)

The use of matte painting was quickly inherent to film due to succession from the pre-established sets in the medium of theatre, and like the multiple exposure process, this began at the emergence of film. As opposed to postproduction-based environments, matte paintings allowed for a premade backdrop, which would provide the filmmaker an element of authenticity and could better place the actors within the context of the scene.

Although matte painting allows more filming flexibility, it requires the arduous process of hand painting and still has to represent a fictitious, yet visually tactile environment. The American film critic, Stephen Prince, underlines the effectiveness of this process by stating that “Matte paintings illustrate the limitations of the photographic model of cinema” and further elaborates on the considerations involved in the process;

“While a cinematographer works with real light, the matte painter works more impressionistically, creating texture and atmosphere with paint and brush (or pixels and mouse).”

- Prince, 2011

Chroma Key (Established- 1940)

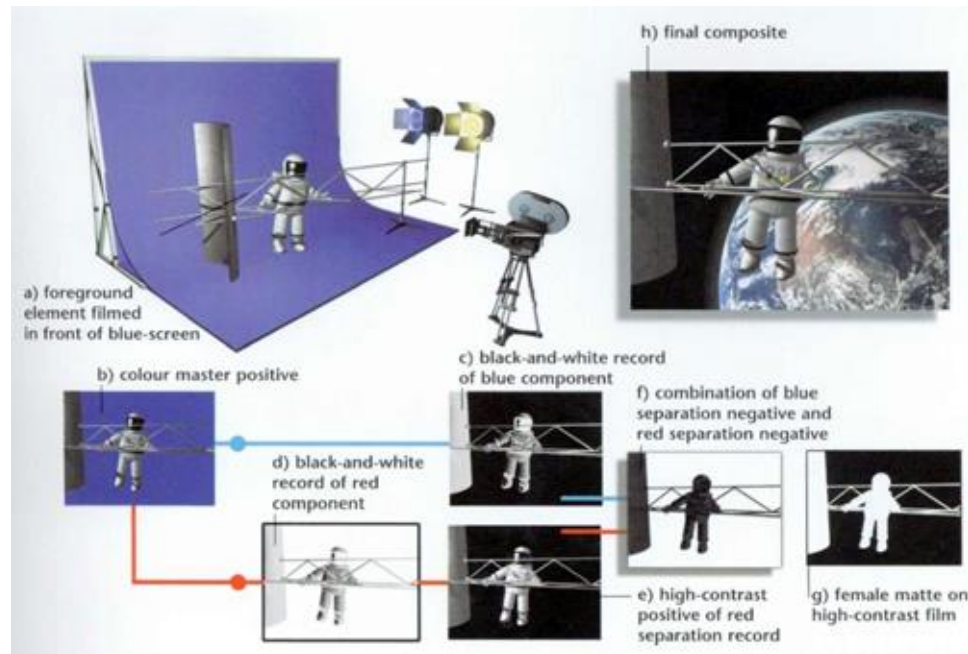


Figure 3- Diagram illustrating the process involved for separating the plates used within a final composition element (FX Making Of, 2014).

The first mainstream use of chroma key or the 'travelling matte' was in the film, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). This involved the capturing of an element, creating an opaque mask and using this to place over a separate piece of film. This process would go on to become a staple of post-processing effects and become more available to wider markets of filmmakers, as the technology developed.

Sodium Vapor Process (Established- Late 1950s)

This process was scouted out by Disney (to be used in films in the 60s and 70s), as a way of achieving higher quality film plates than the existing 'colour-difference' chromakey. The exactness of the wavelength registration of sodium vapour, allowed for very detailed accuracy for overlaying actors on an animated background.



Figure 4- Mary Poppins (1964). This shot gives a clear demonstration of the Sodium Vapour Process, as the bright clothes and translucent veil do not conflict with the background (leaving a clear backdrop).

The light's wavelength (emitting from behind the actors) could be registered by a modified Technicolour camera and create a very effective mask. An early precedent for the continuation of the innovative development from static backgrounds to digital practices.

ILM StageCraft (Established 2019)

Considered as the most contemporary pipeline for digital-based film environment production. *Industrial Light and Magic's Stagecraft* consists of digital alternatives to; location scouting, set design and lighting. The “integrated virtual production platform” allows film production members to pre-visualise representations of their sets, getting a grasp of the practicality and requirements for filming (Industrial Light & Magic, 2021).



Figure 5- Shooting principal photography, while using both physical set pieces and StageCraft's background LED screens with a prerendered environment displayed (*Industrial Light & Magic, 2021*).

Along with the use of virtual sets (background screens), filmmakers can capture a realistic effect of light behaviour, as it bounces from the screen and off the performers or physical props. A passive and seemingly subconscious way of grounding the

audiences' sense of realism and manipulating their perception of what is a 3D generated environment.

In a certain way, aspects of this development pipeline fall into place with the creation of video game environments, especially since this technology allows filmmakers to create artificial and fictitious environments through the medium of digital design software. However, due to the practicality of filming against prerendered screens, means that the filmmaker loses the iterative capability seen in chroma key style postproduction and therefore must be dedicated to the premade environment setup before filming (reminiscent to matte background setups). This places more consideration on effective environment visuals and is less of an afterthought through postproduction. This technology has only been frequently used for mainstream Sci-Fi and Action orientated subject material, due to the elements of setup involved and the ongoing development, it is not a widely available filming procedure (and not applicable to the requirements of most filmmakers).

Similarly, as the Hollywood film industry shifts towards the next advancement in digital production, so does game software, which enables and supports this contemporary production style. The Unreal Engine (used within StageCraft) currently allows for game developers to improve upon the representation of sound in a digital space, "Recommendations based on technical data – such as numerical reverberation time - [meaning] little to anyone except acousticians... The ability to communicate in an experiential way instead can provide a huge step towards full engagement" (Pimentel, 2021) following the engine development of realistic, 3D audio. The auditory focus expands upon the immersive stimuli which is likely to be tackled in near developments and uses the basis of the already established, cinematic use of sound. The following case studies will explore the current techniques (focusing on visual stimuli) for immersive compositions and delineate the effectiveness of the approaches.

Case Study 1

The Cinematic Use of Drab Surrealism in ‘*The Stanley Parable*’ (Galactic Cafe, 2011) and ‘*A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*’. (Dir. Roy Andersson, 2014)

Introduction to Relationship Between Film and Game Media

The status quo for a majority of successful film franchises involves the ‘spin off’ video game. This is prevalent when concerning films which have audiences consisting of a younger market (games tailored to this juvenile audience) and films which have styles deemed appropriate for an adaptation (common with big blockbuster titles), utilising the target market as members of a preestablished audience.

This is a popular, “Hollywood standard” style of (profitable) practice, using a film IP to license out to game developers in “agreements [which] can vary significantly depending on the items produced and popularity of the content” (Brookey, 2010), as popularity is the forefront reasoning for game spin offs, smaller and more independent film titles do not follow the same business structure, due to smaller markets.

A sustaining example of this “Hollywood standard” would be the catalogue of 007, first person shooter titles, based off the *James Bond* franchise, with the first being, *James Bond 007* (1983) for the Atari 2600, 5200 and the Commodore 64.

These movie-based game titles have since grown in popularity, now competing with successful, original IP based games and continue to garner anticipation for the releases. This monopoly of film franchises encroaching through the media of video games can be seen more recently, as *Lucasfilm Games* announcing it branching out to established, game development companies like *Bethesda* and further expanding their franchise focused, media repertoire (*StarWars.com*, 2021).

This rise in success for Hollywood game adaptations, is likely to match the efficiency at which contemporary game capabilities can create similarly engaging experiences for an audience, through effectively replicating motifs from the core film material and adapting this to a game based medium. The player can expect a familiar (visual and narrative) experience from the film, scaled to fit within a game campaign, this usually involves alterations such as visual affordances for gameplay and a narrative which better accommodates the use of cut scenes (appropriate story extent).

The closeness at which the games can follow a film's style is relevant to the contemporary method (ILM StageCraft) of using game engines to render film environments, which naturally lends itself to the accuracy at which the game developers can represent and recreate film settings, for in-game levels. Blurring the line between the two mediums and giving the subject material a feel of strong consistency, for the benefit of the audiences' engagement and immersion with the franchise.



Figure 6- Marketing content for Lucasfilm Games and Bethesda's upcoming Indiana Jones game title (Bethesda, 2021)

Alongside this rise in success of movie-game titles, is the rise in popularity of indie based titles, and is a diverse genre which offers different approaches to the development of traditionally successful game titles. A contemporary example of the market investment into indie titles, is the multi-media production company *Annapurna*. Founded by film producer, Megan Ellison, in 2011, *Annapurna* expanded its media catalogue with the introduction of a video game publishing branch, *Annapurna Interactive*, which offered more exposure to visually 'cinematic' titles such as 'What Remains of Edith Finch' (2017) and 'If Found...' (2020). Many of these titles follow stringently linear narrative structures but allow for stories with more depth and opportunity for a more thematically diverse style of gameplay.

This endeavour to tackle more palpable narrative in games production has been recognised by nominations and awards from various established associations (*BAFTA Games Award for Best Video Game 2018*, *The Game Award for Best Narrative 2017*, for *What Remains of Edith Finch*). One indie game which rapidly accumulated

audience appraisal and critic recognition, since its release, is the 2011 game, *The Stanley Parable* (nominated for BAFTA in Game Innovation, Debut Game, and NAVGTR Winner for Best Writing in Comedy).

Brief Background of The Stanley Parable developers, Davey Wreden and William Pugh

Beginning as a *Half Life 2* (Valve, 2004) mod in 2011 (being updated through to 2015, as Pugh joined development for the standalone title), *The Stanley Parable*, was initially developed by Davey Wreden, as a means to challenge the idea of an “impossible game” and how to utilise the players choice as a mechanic within a seemingly, open-ended styled environment. The game had since been scheduled for a re-release version in 2019, with updated content and additional gameplay, however, the release was delayed to 2021.



Figure 7- The Stanley Parable, ‘Two Doors’ sequence, the first moment in which the player interacts with the game’s decision-based narrative.

Due to this choice-centric style of gameplay and a self-consciousness narrative, Wreden and Pugh developed a game which subverts the player’s expectations of game-based choice. “Suddenly people are having their own experiences... going back and forth or going to the other room and just staying there, restarting the game and

not doing any of that other stuff... it becomes like a stage, rather than when there's only one thing you can do" (Wreden, 2014), these elements help promote a game which has unique and experimental playability in terms of story exploration and interaction.

The player interactions within the seemingly dull environments, will provide for visual and practical analysis in this case study (the effectiveness of techniques will be comparative to that of a film with a similar theme and tone).

Brief Background of Swedish Film Director Roy Andersson

'A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence' is, Swedish film director, Roy Andersson's final instalment of his *'Living Trilogy'*, an auteurist trilogy which "has a distinctive style that expresses what it means to be human... these films span the mundane and absurd... with deadpan comedy and [images of inhumanity]" (Hanke, 2019). To the audience it seems that Andersson's films evoke a dreamlike experience, with film compositions which seem minimal, clean and purposeful.

In an interview Andersson has indicated the precise control he has over his film sets, "We built it in a studio... to be in control of light and composition... you couldn't find such a beach outdoors" in essence everything in frame is artificial and "it's purified and condensed" (Andersson, 2015) as to only provide for what tone or narrative that scene needs to convey.



Figure 8- A scene at the beginning of APSOAB (2014), in which a character takes their time looking at a museum display and may allude to Andersson's view of self-parody.

Andersson explains that he is inspired by traditional artists, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Pieter Bruegel (D.1569), which explains his artistic view on environment composition. A similar picturesque-styled control of an environment can be seen in the works of the landscape designer Capability Brown, who instead, (as established in Review of Literature) manipulated his environments in accordance to guiding the viewer's attention around a country park.

Andersson's scenes tend to ruminate on the subject matter, like that of an art exhibition and is a form which Andersson seems to imitate in the cinematic structure of APSOAB, it is also reflected directly in an initial scene. Anderssons use of composition will be further analysed, in consideration to the visual language of film media in this case study.

Reasoning for Approach

As opposed to studying the tone and feel of a film and its 'spin-off' game equivalent, the following film and game for analysis will be, 'A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence' and 'The Stanley Parable'. Two pieces of media which are not directly related but are tonally and thematically similar in approach to their subject matter. This will allow for clearer observations on how these two styles of media utilise visual design, with comparable basis.

By using film and media with more independent backgrounds, allows for examination into how more unique and auteur based art styles can communicate contemporary subject matter. As opposed to Hollywood blockbuster titles, which mostly do not tackle challenging matter and avoid avant garde design choices (offering little in the form of the artists own expression).

Both TSP and APSOAB follow narratives with bleak settings, instilled philosophical values and dark humour as result of the austere subject matter of each. The element of existentialism is also present in both, these tones and themes are unlikely to be covered in mainstream entertainment media and offer less conventionalism as seen in 'spin-off' titles.

Brief Summary of Game and Film for Study

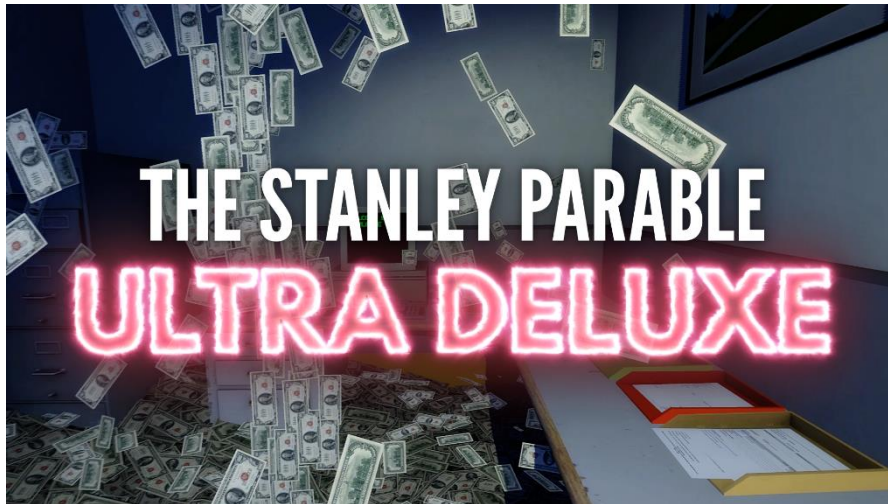


Figure 9- Promotional cover image for TSP's 2021 release (Stanley Parable, 2019)

In 'The Stanley Parable' (TSP), the player controls the titular character, as they navigate and explore an office building, whilst looking for co-workers. The entirety of the game events and player's actions are being narrated, this provides the player incentive to uncover more narrative, and supplements the choice function within the game. TSP's outcomes are entirely down to combinations of choice, the narrator's story will manipulate according to the player's choice and provide comments appropriate to the course of action. One course of action a player can take; is to follow the past-tense, narrated instructions, complying with the narrator and completing the game through the 'Freedom Ending' (Stanley breaks free of his monotonous job and escapes outside). The multiple endings provide replay-ability and multiple opportunities for a diverse and open-ended style of game, ultimately challenging the conventions of most choice-interactive games.

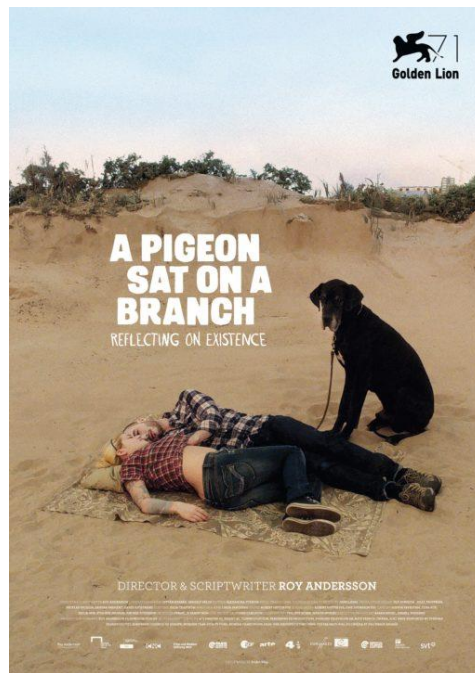


Figure 10- International poster for APSOAB (Coproduct Office, 2014)

‘A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence’ (APSOAB), primarily follows the story of two travelling salesmen (specialising in novelty items, which contradicts both the sentiment and aesthetic of the film), but throughout, intermittently cuts to short stories, which maintain the overall feel and portrayal of the film. The film (like the prior films in the ‘Living Trilogy’) focuses on the ineptitudes and darkly humorous elements of people’s lives.

Throughout the film the feeling of alienation looms, as both salesmen become impatient with their livelihoods and struggle with one another’s temperament (labelling each other ‘bully’ and ‘cry baby’). Along with the detached way in which stories are presented, the film overall creates a bleak outlook on human behaviour, and relies on humour to create relief from Andersson’s surely dire outlook.

Cinematic Language Analysis of Environments



Figure 11- Example of linear-style environment layout in TSP, in which function is placed before aesthetic, to coincide with both the office setting and gameplay style.

In TSP, linearity takes form in the multiple endings possible in the game and in the moments forced by the narrator character (player is left with no option but to comply with events). The core visual style of TSP represents this linearity via a stringent and bureaucratic office layout, through both explicit aesthetics (worn down desks and scattered papers) and functional design of the areas. On functionality, product designer, Dieter Rams (2014) writes his fifth design principle, “Good design is unobtrusive. Functional [designs] are like tools. They are neither decorative nor artworks. They must keep to the background”, this principle clearly aligns with the hallway and office designs in TSP, which give an easy-to-follow layout, presenting clear paths of choice for interaction. Despite this effective style of design, TSP does not maintain a constant or conforming flow of level design, instead it branches off to various degrees of surreal nature and these elements make up for the self-referential portions of gameplay.



Figure 12- Examples of linear-perspective composition in APSOAB (2014), characters represented in this traditional style are made small by the environments and are physically staged on straight paths.

As a result of Andersson's sound stage method and his influences from traditional art; there is very little camera movement throughout APSOAB, this creates shots which are reminiscent of linear-perspective artworks. This is emphasised by Andersson's own use of unobtrusive-style environments, which give negative space to illustrate the vanishing points in certain backdrops. Andersson uses his environments, in a similar capacity to Capability Brown, to guide the viewers' attention to elements of the image which are important to narrative and theme. Framing the subject matter "is the fundamental act of filmmaking... filmmakers must direct the audience's attention... Choosing the frame is a matter of conveying the story, but is also a question of composition, rhythm and perspective" (Brown, 2016), and here in Andersson's work, it portrays the linearity of the character's lives (or passing through events, always projecting a path through the current subject matter) linking back to humour in futility.

The blocking of every scene in APSOAB either makes the characters seem small or confine them within the static composition, a similar comparison can be made to TSP, as the office styled environments and audio of the castigating narrator, instil a strong sense of oppression within the audience. This is contrasted in both mediums through the introduction of humour, by the means of schadenfreude focused situations, in which we see the protagonists as inept explorers. Through the surreal visual styling of both TSP and APSOAB, this lends a way of detaching the audience from the situation of the characters (allowing the audience to laugh at their predicaments, as the audience does not have to contend with the practicalities of the situation) and still retains sympathy due to the protagonists' underdog traits.

The Dreamlike and Surreal Environments

The introduction to APSOAB begins with the three short stories entitled "Three meetings with death", this sets the pacing for the rest of the film, which switches between seemingly unrelated stories, and only subtly creates connections between the characters involved. In a fashion akin to TSP, on second viewing the audience can more easily pick up on these references, as with TSP, the player can better appreciate the subject matter when multiple options are attempted through replay. This sense of discovery when experiencing media can positively affect the viewers engagement, however, TSP has practical advantage over Andersson's work, as the player can interact with each setting at their own pacing. On the joy of discovery, McGreevy (2015) writes, games "give players almost complete agency over their experience with their surroundings and have room for players to interact with and experience fictional environments", whereas APSOAB tackles discovery through interwoven character plotlines (allowing the audience to their own interpretation of the events).

Andersson's composition of each scene follows the methodology of the landscape art he was inspired by, and the majority of the scenes clearly consist of; foreground, midground and background. However, this way of presenting the film as individual artworks does not serve to distance the audience from immersion, instead, the audience feels more engaged with the characters and setting, as the audience is positioned as the spectator or bystander. This is a technique similar in function to the 'Tatami Mat' filming method used by Japanese film director, Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963), who placed cameras at eye level with the actors throughout his films, to represent the audience's height when sat on a tatami (floor) mat, and centred attention to the personal conversations between characters, effectively positioning the audience within the room (Singer, 2016). This 'observer' based filming style is in keeping with Andersson's subject matter and the reasoning for the film title, based on the birds in Bruegel's painting "sitting in the trees, looking down to what's going on in the villages, they wonder what they're doing these people" (Andersson, 2015).



Figure 13- Andersson's soundstage in use for APSOAB, both matte painting and chroma key are being implemented to present the background for the composited result (The Film Stage, 2015).

Due to the nature of TSP's gameplay, which often breaks conventions (through narrative and function), the environments do not include the visual affordances which players (with prior knowledge of video games) would expect. This influences the player to approach interactions from a similar standpoint to viewing a film, paying attention to the narrator and observing the environment for interactivity, there are few consistent affordances seen throughout the gameplay. For typical game design, the developers should Provide Structure (Rogers, 2014), Wreden and Pugh initially use a repeating environment layout to make the viewer feel conscious of the surreal nature of the game (a never-ending loop).

As players' progress, levels become much more diverse and surreal, making it feel like a more unique and cinematic experience, this progression is emphasised by the developers' conscious use of repetition at the start of the game. A strong sense of repeating levels is something typical game design avoids, as to develop a more 'realistic' or 'natural' layout, whereas Wreden and Pugh utilise this style to subvert expectations and setup a (grounded) visual-control style for later unorthodox levels. In APSOAB, Andersson avoids completely repetitive use of environment designs, the same set is never overtly repeated, and his core visual style is what retains consistency and atmosphere (framing composition is repeated for the desired perception of each environment).

Implication of Audio

TSP is able to use comedy in the form of the omnipresent narrator, the futility of the players choices in attempts to beat Wreden's "impossible game" are continually picked apart through the narrator, and due to narration being the core source of audible

feedback, the player's behaviour (play style) is directly being altered or influenced. Whatever environment the player is exposed to, is due to their decision along the choice branches, the narrator will often pre-empt the following experience with reasoning for the player's actions, and because of this the player can predict or anticipate what focus the next environment will surround (allowing the developers to subvert and control the player's assumptions on their narrative path). Other than the narrator, TSP uses typical diegetic sound to emphasise the setting (constant drone of the office air conditioning) and applies (non-diegetic) music where significant plot points occur (upon escape from the office, classical music plays, underlining the poignancy of the ending).

For audio in APSOAB, Andersson uses classical styled music which evoke a more trepidatious and jovial atmosphere, this is in stark contradiction to the imagery and situations presented (exaggerating and acknowledging the light-hearted aspect). The use of diegetic sound is also core to APSOAB, this allows for conversations to take focus and poignancy, especially when presenting existential based statements. Silence is dramatized by lack of diegetic background noise, which influences the viewer to appreciate the imagery, and often instils awkward moments which exaggerate the sense of futility and the dejected nature of the characters.

In respect to 'sound effects', Rogers (2014) emphasises the functionality of sounds within game settings, "Do you notice that the game just isn't the same without sound effects? Often, a lot of information is delivered to the player via sound", for TSP this priority of using sound for informative response isn't prevalent. Instead, TSP's soundscape caters more towards atmospheric tone through diegetic sounds and non-diegetic music. Therefore, TSP's approach is more in accordance to the cinematic stylings of Andersson's APSOAB, where audio is used alongside visuals and emphasises the emotion of the subject matter being conveyed.

Conclusion on Visual Approaches

On consideration to environment design, game developer, Scott Rogers (2014), stated that he believes “that it is within a game’s level where the story should actually be told. Using space to tell a story isn’t a new concept; this approach has been in architectural design for centuries”, through both exterior and interior design, both APSOAB and TSP, effectively use the compositions (in framing and structure) of their environments to reflect their desired atmosphere and convey the narrative of the subject matter.

APSOAB uses dark humour along the core narrative (and candidly through the tragicomic, short stories), but Andersson employs this through depictions of more serious subject matter, as said by critic Mark Kermode (2015), “Underneath it all is an anti-materialist thread, which leads to a nightmarish depiction of monstrous slavery and industrial inhumanity – the ghosts of a guilty colonial past coming back to haunt the living?”. Nevertheless, the humorous undertone in futility is represented effectively in this film, by compositions which centralise on the inept characters by isolating them, and by the means of using more politically- powered imagery may even influence a stronger emotive response from certain audiences. TSP does not tackle such controversial sub-narratives, but also uses humour in a similar way, as it is emphasised by the oppressive and conformist environments.

Both mediums effectively use perspective to portray the string of events which they consist of and use visually linear styled environments to do so. Andersson uses perspective-based framing to coincide with his narrative (drawing viewers’ attention to events through artistic composition), while Wreden relies on level designs based on functionality to inform the aesthetic within TSP and this achieves the minimal

environments in which the player is presented with abstract choices and a setting which reflects the feeling of linearity within the choices made.

Case Study 2

Red Dead Redemption 2 and the Influence of ‘Spaghetti Western’ Cinematic Motifs

Introduction to Analysis

After observing the effectiveness of visual design principles, seen in independent forms for both TSP and APSOAB. The same approach will be applied to the game, Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) and provide an understanding of how a visually broader game can implement existing cinematic techniques (from the widely accepted subgenre, Spaghetti Western), and how this translates to a 3D environment with gameplay functionality.

This analysis will be achieved through the basis of understanding from the literature review, which underlined the importance of cinematic mise en scene and the importance of the visually tactile environment. In a similar capacity to analysing the works of auteurs and unique themes in *Case Study 1*, this analysis will focus towards comparison of the Spaghetti Western, as this subgenre established a unique, alternative approach and attitude to challenging the existing (mainstream) American Western (during it's time of prevalence). On the study of the Spaghetti Western (SW) as an object of study, Fridlund (2014) wrote that the SW subgenre could be viewed as an “inferior imitation of the American western”, which only served to renew the aging genre, but it can also be seen as a “counter genre” criticising established motifs set by American filmmakers, or that it is its own independent genre “with only superficial resemblance to the American one”.

Overview of Spaghetti Western Visual Style

There are two, long-standing visual motifs of the SW film catalogue, the use of 'extreme' camera work and visually kinetic (gritty) mise en scene, these aspects are a part of what gives the Italian Western an avant garde approach. These visual techniques serve to provide emphasis on the central character's disposition and express themes of the genre, for a SW narrative "the way to approach violence [through mise en scene], it's not moralistic, it's more instinctive, you are attracted, and you have repulsion" (Forzani, 2017). To truly represent the central character and lawless narratives, strong cinematography must be employed to present this and engage the audience.

In SW's film language, the environment always gives pathetic fallacy to the psychoanalysis of the central character, who is often solitary and in pursuit of a just cause. Fridlund (2014) summarises this narrative methodology as (the archetypal SW protagonist); Hero who is unknown to society demonstrates exceptional ability, society is not completely acceptive, there is a conflict between society and imposing villains, respect is made between villain and hero, however, after the villain threatens society, the hero reacts and takes down the villain, society is safe, and the hero is respected equally (no longer unknown).



Figure 14- *Django* (1966), a zoom-in shot on the protagonist, while the muddy and barren environment is utilised to elicit the psychoanalysis (the unconscious thoughts and feelings) of the SW character archetype, reflecting a solitary and harsh existence.

Through cinematic techniques, the filmmaker achieves the pathetic fallacy between protagonist and environment, by utilising settings which reflect the unknown nature of the hero. In the 1966 SW, *Django*, the film's director, Sergio Corbucci, represents the titular character's alienation through extreme camera zooms, as Django pulls a coffin (emphasis of theme through mise en scene) through barren landscapes.

Red Dead Redemption 2's Visual Style and Functionality

True to the overall Western genre, RDR2's narrative follows a band of outlaws, trying to make ends meet as they travel on-the-run from authorities, and develops on story perspectives of the central character. However, unlike the confines of film media, in RDR2's narrative, the just cause of the protagonist is represented by the player's

choice and the narrative outcome also relies on player choice (game-based interaction, inherently opening up immersion).

While SWs rely on their canon of visual techniques to deliver a linear story, RDR2 tackles narrative through an open world setting, giving the player the means to break away from core story ‘missions’ and interactive with passive gameplay features (hunting, collecting items, etc.) within a wider environment. It is important that passive activities are available to the player, as it provides incentive for engagement and immersion through the form of discovery. This minigame-esque style of playability, “provide variety, represents activities, and adds value to a product” (Rogers, 2014), as it is effectively used in RDR2, the minigames give players a feel of meaning to their actions and a cumulative feel of progression (for themselves and subsequently their character). The use of this element of game design theory can attribute (alongside visual language) to the overall immersion of the player within, what equivalates to, an active environment (providing both cinematic and functional qualities).



Figure 15- Wide angle/ratio, cut-scene shot, for exposition of a rival gang hideout in RDR2 (2018)

On consideration to expository landscapes within an 'open-world' game, RDR2 compensates for big, open play-spaces by implementing passive gameplay possibilities. These passive experiences (involving; hunting, gathering, NPC encounters, etc.) provide the necessary incentive for the player to break away from the core story path and garner immersion through the method of discovery.

Landscape designer, Capability Brown (Rutherford, 2016), would often use framing techniques within the landscape to direct the audience's view to a place of interest, RDR2 approaches this in an alternative way, due to its use of passive gameplay and easy-access map information (making navigation to key areas obvious). Instead, when RDR2 needs to guide the player's attention, traditional cut away methods are used in preliminary mission cut scenes, the scene will often cut to an expository shot and these wide-angle shots used (screen aspect ratio changes) are reminiscent to the wide shots commonly seen in SWs.

As opposed to using a wide shot for establishing an environment with pathetic fallacy to the protagonist, RDR2 uses the wide shots to direct the player, and avoids using 'punchy' camerawork, as the energy of the scene is captured within the gameplay combat portion. By using 'extreme' shots in the short cut scenes the player may be distanced from the immersive perspective of the character, as they are not having functional interaction through gameplay).

For using multiple camera views, Rogers (2014), explains that the placement of the player's camera affects both functionality and visual design, it's common for a game to have multiple cameras. RDR2 counteracts the ideology of one main camera, by not only offering the player a choice between third or first person but introducing the

'cinematic camera' choice in certain situations (travelling on horse) and it can sometimes affect the viewers sense of control. The cinematic camera uses a wider aspect ratio and focuses on cutting between expository-style shots, like the SW it improves the viewer's sense of emotion and engagement with the psychoanalysis of the character (camera frames the protagonist, often, as the lone hero).

Due to the camera cutting to an alternate view, immersion is being risked as the cut scenes' camera angles do not conform with the established gameplay camera perspective, so the camera always cuts back to a closer, character shot which allows for a careful transition back into the main character view. It remains clear that RDR2 intentionally focuses its visual design towards an uninterrupted, cinematic quality, even in gameplay, the HUD only utilises the essential icons and only when necessary (reflecting actions taken by player and can even be disabled). Maintaining the subject's theme and effectively alluding to its cinematic equivalent, the seminal SW subgenre.

Conclusion on Study

Through using existing film media in the case studies, it was understood how directors of independent titles, such as Roy Andersson, can implement traditional, composition techniques (and special effects) to communicate the feelings and motivations of characters, and exaggerate the overall tone of the subject matter. On comparison to Wreden's TSP, it proved that an indie game of the same thematic calibre, also implemented similar techniques to that of film (through alternate, digital methods) and general design theory. This comprehension of film language was assisted by the initial summary of film effect techniques, allowing for reference to established material and effective understanding of how APSOAB and Westerns can visually deliver or present the subject material (and to what effect) within digital environments. Theory was attributed to interpret the reason for techniques used, and the effect produced by the filmmaker/developer.

By conducting two case studies on two alternative themes/tones of subject material, it was discovered that; media centred in independent markets (TSP and APSOAB) both use cinematic techniques and compositional design theory, in approach to their subject matter. This is due to the factor that these media artefacts cater to the avant garde style of media production, where the artist (director/developer) can approach their medium through more experimental methods (seen in Andersson's static, Bruegel-inspired compositions, and in Wreden's bureaucratic aesthetic being used to subvert expectations). The use of cinematic methods did supplement immersion in both, as the techniques emphasised the unique and unconventional subject matter, this could be expected as more independent projects are likely to come from an individual's personal enthusiasm for the subject and subsequently their devotion to effectively communicate the story, in the end comprising an auteur styled body of work.

Arguably the SW characteristically uses extreme long shots of the protagonist, to distance the viewer from the character (the protagonist seems small and detached from the world), however, as these long shots expose more of the surrounding environment, it was established that the setting reflected the psychoanalysis of the protagonist and allowed the viewer to engage with empathy (as opposed to close ups of the actor's performance). The importance of exposing the environment was emphasised by the camera choices made in RDR2, which also supported expository shots of the places of interest, and direct cinematic framing of the main character.

Both case studies highlight the effectiveness of framing an environment, which includes the protagonist for context and visual reflection between the character and their surroundings. Due to the solitary nature of the subject matter in both case studies, the environments in the media centralised on making the characters seem small and oppressed by their locations, through similar use of the all-important wide framed, expository shot. In summary, the studies established that all the selected media tended to align more closely to the theory of traditional visual design methods (favoured less of traditional game theory), and cinematically based compositions to treat immersion.

Furthering Research

Ongoing study could lead towards further analysis of TSP and APSOAB, taking a multifaceted approach surrounding specific areas of both film and game design. The narrative/storylines of the media could be examined, to understand the approaches taken to develop emotion and audience's response. This further analysis would provide a broader range of comparable, independently based artefacts, and the award credited titles from Annapurna Interactive, could provide possibilities to observe different approaches from alternative developers. A sample of media from the

'blockbuster spinoff' focused market, could also be analysed in direct comparison to independent titles, and may assist to underline the techniques which bigger developers utilise (which is likely to be based closer to established gameplay theory, in opposition to cinematic style).

Utilising the two prior films in Andersson's Living Trilogy, would also provide a wider quantity of material for a more comprehensive investigation with the comparable indie game titles and whether there is more interchangeable methodology between film and digital game media. Media which does not focus on the alienation of the characters, would also provide a beneficial understanding of what techniques are used to present characters in reference to alternative thematic subject material (how is unity or relationship bonds conveyed).

Evaluation of Study

To summarise, the report was successful in covering the implementations of 'traditional' cinematic techniques, as evidence was provided for aspects of film language within the game environments, and film media was utilised effectively to highlight the use of visual design with scene compositions, also providing reference for similarities within the game media analysed. However, the theme and tones of subject matter in both the case studies followed similar narrative traits (such as isolation of the protagonist), therefore more varying media could have analysed in an additional study and allowed for analysis on an even more diverse range of media artefacts.

Theories on compositional design and functionality techniques were observed throughout the study and provided justification for the choices made by the directors or developers. Certain specific elements of design could have also been observed further, providing examination on design basics such as colour or shape theory and would provide a more meticulous breakdown of the additional passive elements of visual language or mise en scene.

Reflection on Study

From conducting this research and analysis in this study, appreciation was contrived for the means in which filmmakers have utilised and pioneered technology which have allowed for creatives to tackle more unconventional styles of presenting fictitious subject matter. This has developed clearer understanding of the contemporary capabilities of cinematic visual effects, including how this field of production now overlaps with 3D environment methodology, and likelihood of film and game design techniques starting to coincide through emerging technologies.

By using design theory and analysing the existing methods which align with cinematic visual language. This study can be used to self-examine future bodies of personal design work and provide theory-based application to areas of environment design ideas, to develop more immersive experiences for viewers and engaging compositions.

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