

NEW ERA OF SURREALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE OF GAMES

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ABSTRACT

NEW ERA OF SURREALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE OF GAMES

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Digital gaming is a novice field that just started to explore its potential within human dynamics in the last three decades. In contrast, Surrealism was founded a century ago as an avant-garde movement and it has morphed into every medium with different forms. Still, Surrealism has not been popular, and its importance has not been completely understood by being overshadowed by mass entertainment products. However, until the development of digital games; the interactivity of art had always been dependent on spectators' perception. For a phenomenon that requires the constant active participation of the audience, Surrealism had been only performable to niche groups of people who can perceive art as an interactive experience. However, digital games can be the turning point for Surrealism, making it a common activity of medium consumption. In this article, Kentucky Route Zero by Cardboard Computer is being analyzed to understand its relatedness to surrealist activity and in which ways the game achieves to create a surrealist experience.

Keywords: Game Design, Surrealism, Close Reading, Interactivity

ÖZ

OYUNLARIN DİJİTAL ÇAĞINDA YENİ SÜRREALİZM ÇAĞI

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Dijital oyun, son otuz yılda insan dinamikleri içindeki potansiyelini keşfetmeye yeni başlayan acemi bir alandır. Buna karşılık Sürrealizm, bir asır önce avangard bir hareket olarak kurulmuş ve her mecrada farklı formlarda ortaya çıkmıştır. Yine de Sürrealizm halk arasında popülerlik yakalayamamış ve kitlesel eğlence ürünlerinin gölgesinde kalarak önemi tam olarak anlaşılammıştır. Dijital oyunların gelişimine kadar; sanatın etkileşimi her zaman seyircinin algısına bağlı olmuştur. Seyircinin sürekli aktif katılımını gerektiren bir fenomen olan Sürrealizm; şu ana kadar yalnızca sanatı etkileşimli bir deneyim olarak algılayabilen niş insan grupları tarafından gerçekleştirilebildi. Ancak dijital oyunlar sürrealizmin algılanma şekline devrim getirerek herkesin mecra ile etkileşimi sağlayabilir. Bu şekilde sürreal aktivite sanat camiasının dışında da varlığını sürdülebilen bir olgu haline gelebilir. Bu makale sürrealizmin dijital oyun alanında nasıl varlığını sürdürdüğünü incelemek amacıyla yazılmıştır. Makalede, Cardboard Computer'dan Kentucky Route Zero isimli oyun analiz edilerek, oyunun sürrealist etkinlikle ilişkisini ve sürrealist bir deneyim yaratmayı hangi yollarla başardığı anlamaya çalışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Oyun tasarımı, Sürrealizm, Yakın Okuma, Etkileşim

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Surrealism was the avant-garde movement that appeared after the end of WWI (T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2022). The term avant-garde means experimental, and reformer works in politics, culture, and art. The surrealist movement aimed to ‘change a life’ by creating new definitions and concepts in art (Hopkins, 2004, pp. 2,3). Surrealism has had complicated and dynamic history through 20 and 21st centuries, with the evolution of art mediums and technology. It is rooted in the desperate existence of human history within the Armageddon of World Wars. But it has also grown within humanity, our social interactivity, and even our reality that is near the cliff of change with the evolvment of technology. On the other side of the cliff, there was a newborn art/entertainment medium, digital games. Digital games are one of the youngest mediums that tries to adapt and use surrealist elements. The digital age provides unlimited variety and ways to interact with its users. Digital games make the audience an active part of the experience and immerse them into its world by triggering their cognitions. In other words, games can easily change the reality of their audience to make them enter their world, which may be one of the most appropriate states to reach audiences’ minds.

Surrealist elements reach their most enhanced potential to provide spectator-based experiences within games. In an art piece consisting surrealist approach where the plot is not rigid, player immersion creates a powerful connection between artists and players' subconscious. Kentucky Route Zero is one of the recent samples that adopt this approach to create a unique experience that can attract spectators easily by breaking barriers of reality in slow and mysterious ways. Still, overutilizing the term “Surrealist” in other mediums makes it very hard to specify what game elements create a surreal experience and which medium's capabilities are being used to create those elements. In this article, Surrealist Movement will be defined within its history and how different mediums helped its evolution through the last century. Then the involvement of digital games will be discussed within the context of Surrealism. In

analysis, I will try to discover surrealist elements in the game *Kentucky Route Zero* with the close-reading method (Cardboard Computer, 2016-2020).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

1.1 Origin of Surrealism

Surrealism's origin goes a long way back to the 1920s. The movement was formed in France in 1924 as a derivative of Dadaism. Dada is a reactive movement that appeared in Europe as the avant-garde of the war era. Dada was rejecting logic in the art and reconstructing the meaning of aesthetics which were thought to be disturbed by imposed ideas of beauty in artists' minds (Carter, 2012).

Although Surrealism was seen as Dada's artistic heritage, they contradicted each other within their core philosophy. In "Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction," Hopkins defines dada as a chaotic movement that tears down modern life; in contrast, Surrealism is defined as a constructor of everyday people's minds within their subconscious power (Hopkins, 2004, p. 16). In other words, dada was a destructive movement that challenged norms in art and the logic of life, despite surrealism trying to enable to build a connection with the inner thoughts of artists and themselves. Surrealism provides psychic automatism to express the mind's true thoughts without considering any aesthetics and moral limitations (Klingsöhr-Leroy, 2020). The movement emphasizes that our dreams provide superior reality with a pure form of free associations and break bounds defined within our banal daily life.

Surrealism is heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud's work, particularly the book "The Interpretation of Dreams". Psychoanalysis, a set of theories and techniques to connect with the subconscious mind, became a source of Surrealist techniques and philosophy. The most know leader of surrealism is André Breton, a writer and poet in France. He is known as Popo of the movement (Brandon, 2020). He published Surrealist Manifesto (Manifeste du surréalisme) on 15 October 1924, which delivers the meaning of surrealism and its mission to enhance the human experience. Other surrealist pioneers were Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Salvador Dali, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and Luis Buñuel. They defined surrealism in that era with their art and standpoints as a unified group of Surrealists (Brandon, 2020, p. 4).

In the first Surrealism Manifesto, Breton mentions how Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory and techniques inspired him to define the surrealism (Breton, 1924). He describes logical procedures as a tool for solving secondary and daily problems, and their abilities become limited as people grow. He portrays logic as a pacing entity in a cage that becomes more and more difficult to be free. To reach our authentic selves, he points to dreams, where individual minds become free from daily memories and are one with their subconscious memories.

While Breton was admired and inspired by Freud's theory, Surrealism was not based on Freud's work; instead, it was a guiding light to it (Ali, 2021, pp. 9,10). According to Freud, dreams are the way of interpreting the desires of Ide; animal instincts of humans, which the Ego controls; logical and social behaviors that suppress Ide. He thought Id must be controlled to achieve a functioning society. Although he thought controlling the Id entirely is impossible, his technique, the free association was a powerful way of communicating with subconsciousness that can be used in therapeutic science and help to maintain the Id. On the contrary, Surrealists were using subconsciousness to awaken the mind from the material world. According to Surrealists, when dreaming essence of life speak through instinctual feelings and desires. Therefore communicating with our dreams is the best way to create meaning in an artwork (Magrin, 2009, p. 4).

Definition of Surrealism has been tough to define today with wrong and overuse of the word “surreal.” Nowadays, the word may describe bizarre, fantastic, weirdly unfamiliar, dreamy, or disturbing. However, according to Breton and his followers, Surrealism term must be associated with an artistic movement that attempts to reach subconsciousness with nonsense juxtapositions of words and images (Aspley, 2010, p. 3). In Breton’s manifesto, he defined surrealism as the following: Pure psychic automatism by which it is proposed to express, either verbally or in writing, or any other manner, thought’s real functioning. In the absence of any check exerted by reason, the dictation of thought is without any aesthetic or moral preoccupation. He also announces his founding group members in the manifesto. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Éluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine,

Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault and Vitrac have practiced ABSOLUTE SURREALIS (Brandon, 2020, p. 218).

1.2 Surrealist Techniques and Games

Surrealists used various techniques to uncover depths of subconsciousness. However, games have been the most effective and practical tool for achieving automatism. For the sake of clarity, these are not digital games. These games are not for entertainment or getting into a competition but are practical methods to reach an unknown depth of subconsciousness. With play and surprise techniques used within the Surrealist group, they revealed the creativity of the instinctive mind, especially in creating collective output. In "A Book of Surrealist Games," (Brotchie, 1995), written by Alastair Brotchie, gathered up various games and techniques systematically used by Surrealists. In the book, he describes Surrealist games aim to remove limits and constraints of rationality and aid in creating free words and images. Moreover, he refers to Breton's visions about how the Surrealists movement would recover humanity's imagination by expressing Surrealism as the transition of modern life into homo ludens (human culture oriented around play) from homo-economicus (human behavior oriented around profit, rationality, and self-interest) (Brotchie, 1995, p. 12).

Surrealist games vary by taking advantage of the cognitive skills of the human mind. They may be exploits our language skills, visual perception, auditory processing, or associative memory. At the core of the games, there is instantaneity to trigger the irrational human mind. For instance, in a language game, there is autonomous writing where players write words without thinking and establish rules to initiate continuity. The games can be played with a single player, while multiple players can trigger instantaneity easily and create collaborative outcomes. In child games, there is famously known as "Chinese Whispers" where people whisper to the ears of the next player, and words travel through people with changing forms. While our mind shapes unclear terms by reaching the player's subconsciousness, the result will be the product of each player's mind.

1.3 Past and Today of Surrealism

The surrealism movement started in a strictly disciplined way until the death of Breton in 1966 (Aspley, 2010, p. vii). A Surrealist group makes first declarations gathered around Breton with their applications, techniques, and views towards Surrealism. However, not everyone followed Breton, and the movement adapted through different countries and art movements. In fact, despite the movement's popularity during the interwar period, it was ambiguous who was a Surrealist. This ambiguity continues today as we see Surrealism as a buzzword in different genres.

The first appearances of surrealism started in poetry since founding father Breton was a poet. However, because of the movement's nature, poetry became the most pronounced medium with the juxtaposition of words inspired by psychology instead of logic (Encyclopaedia, 2021, p. p2). But after Breton started to accept other art forms of movement, surrealism appeared in painting with significant achievements. More and more painters started adapting their methodology to the surrealist movement and improved the techniques used to reach inner selves in their works. Because each artist exposes their art to their subconsciousness, Surrealist Painters, cannot be categorized easily due to the diverse outpouring of artists.

The First Surrealist art exhibition brought paintings by Chirico, Ernst, Paul Klee, Andre Masson, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, and Pierre Roy. After “Second Manifeste du surréalisme”, new famous members, Luis Bunuel, Rene Char, and Salvador Dali joined the group. Between The Surrealist Period (1924-1969), these artists created essays, paintings, poets, objects, films, and methods. Some of most famous works are painting of Dali’s Persistence of Memory, poem L’Union libre by Breton, painting The Human Condition by Magritte, Le Déjeuner en fourrure by Meret Oppenheim. On the eve of the Second World War, surrealism was expanding through Europe and USA with exhibitions. After the death of Breton, the official Surrealist group in Paris was dissolved in 1969. While members of the movement continued to be active with exhibitions ambiguity of Surrealism increased without an authoritative figure like Breton. (Aspley, 2010, pp. xx,xxi)

One of the turning points of surrealism was brought by famous painter Rene Magritte. In his work “The Treachery of Images”, he painted a pipe and wrote underneath saying, “Ceci n'est pas une pipe” (This is not a pipe), which challenges the perception of realism. With the painting, he points out how our brain accommodates representation with reality. With his logic, all images are metaphors and metonymies; two types of figures occur in literature. In a way, the pipe represented in the picture is created in the minds of observers, which is altered by the subconscious and free associations. This activity perfectly illustrates the spectator's interaction with a static art medium. Rene’s works show the potentiality of surrealism in a painting by adopting techniques from literature and poems. It also sparks off new techniques that will apply to visual arts.

The eye was the iconic image for defining the pure perception of humans. Breton quotes, “The eye exists in a savage state” (Sheringham, 2006, p. 82) referring to how sight is separated from cognitive biases. Still, it was not an entirely true statement as Gestalt psychology theorized that living organisms perceive visually as a whole instead of individual elements of a scene. Gestalt psychology represents sight especially connected to our biases. However, Richardson reorganizes that quote as; there are methods and contexts to place an eye so that it can see in a savage way. (Richardson, 2006, p. 10). Cinema gets into the surreal arena with this way of thinking. The first movie in Surrealism is “Un Chien Andalou” by famous surreal artist Salvador Dali and director Luis Buñuel. The movie lasts 21 minutes and has no logical plot (Buñuel, 1929). It was created by combining the dreams of Dali and Buñuel. The movie made significant milestones and a fresh way of thinking within the Surrealism approach. It was the first technological advancement that appeared in Surrealist art, which brought the potential active connection between artist and audience.

Breton mentions cinema in his Manifesto as “Three cheers for darkened rooms!”. He believes the film is a realist medium (Richardson, 2006). Movies cannot be created with automatism while they have productions and organizational processes. Narratives and acting may practice automatism but are just sub-elements of films. However, the presentation of films (cinema) breaks this reality and creates a Surreal phenomenon within the audience. Breton even credited Cinema as a ritual that alters realism that pushes spectators to develop their perceptions. Cinema actively forces

them to practice automatism by presenting shouting active elements of a movie. This was significantly more obvious in the 1920s when the storyline was supported with music and a series of pictures without explicit dialogues. This setup created ambiguity in the audience and enabled them to get into surrealist games. However, with the advancement of technology and economy, the rituality diminishes slowly. Mystery dissolved with embedded sounds, television, and digital technology. Stories were being converged to the same style for acceptance of the audience. With each iteration, films have been converted to more rigid experiences.

Visual arts became more valuable mediums within explorations keeping going in Surrealist act. Salvador Dali was one of the pioneers of the Surreal movement with new techniques. He said, "Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision." representing how the spectator's brain is a real creator in Surrealism (Yip, 2018, p. 54). During the evolution of Surrealism, human cognitive research proceeded well. As mentioned in the 1920s Gestalt theorized visual perception of the human brain with tendencies to unify shapes and forms. According to his research, the human brain tries to create relations within objects to create a bigger entity. In other words, the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to its parts by isolating them (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Dali embraced this idea and developed a "double images" technique where he overlaps different images within his creative process. As a result, he created a series of paintings that triggers the audience to create their own images in their brain (Yip, 2018, pp. 55-60). With the more modern manner of telling, living creatures' cognitions host real-time simulation, and Surrealist art aims to create opportunities to alter that simulation and create a new reality.

Recently "double images" technique has been practiced in the digital medium in the work of Kei-Man Yip, who aims to bring Surrealism to AR and VR mediums with the name of "Surrealism in 4D". The name comes from 4th dimension he brings to the experience, interactivity. In the project, Kei-Man Yip uses Dali's and Magritte's works which are adapted to a 3D environment. Moreover, he questions the role of consciousness in the world of Surrealism. He asks if dreams are connections to our subconsciousness, how our consciousness gets into those experiences, or whether our consciousness exists in a dream world. If our consciousness is subject to the dream,

how does our subconsciousness react to the actions of the conscious self? With this call-in question, he tries to find a way to implement interactivity in his projects. However, due to technical possibilities, he had to implement simple interaction elements like enabling to merge of 3D adaptations of Magritte's work. Still, it brought a question to light; what the place of interactivity in Surrealism, and what are the most effective approaches to interactivity that force us to connect inner ourselves? (Yip, 2018)

After the Surrealist period (1969), surrealism continues to show its effect on the creations of humankind. However, due to a lack of rigid definition, Surrealism has been used arbitrarily until today without consistency in meaning. Richardson criticizes this phenomenon in his book "Surrealism and Cinema" and tries to define what is Surrealism and what is not in his words. According to him, Surrealism may be used as a synonym for bizarre, strange, or juxtaposition. Even one can say surrealism has been transformed to an art style. Surrealism became a marketable word to describe art pieces as more brandy. However, it contradicts the essence of surrealism. Surrealism act is an attempt to break the bridge between logic and subcoincesnees which oppose to come down to a style (Richardson, 2006, p. 2). For example, we cannot consider "Un Chien Andalou" as a blueprint of surrealist cinema or Magritte and Dali's paintings as elements of surreal art. We can only examine them in the context of the surrealist act. In fact, from this definition, we must reject the existence of surreal art pieces and accept the existence of surreal elements in art.

1.4 Interactivity in Surrealism

Interactivity takes a vital role in Surrealism from different perspectives. In the book "Dreaming Of Cinema" Adam Lowenstein points out how interactivity connects cinema, games, and Surrealism (Adam, 2014, p. 46). The surrealism age aligns with the development of Cinema in history. Therefore Cinema in Surrealism was a very controversial topic. John Belton, a professor from Rutregts University, shares the same opinion as Breton about Cinema. According to him, the transformation of cinema from analog to digital technologies brought false revolution and killed so-called interactivity as technological advancements also diminished free association experience in Cinema. However, improvements in cinematography and technology bring us more immersive

mediums for narration. For over a hundred years, cinematography history has enabled directors to reach their audiences in different dimensions. Moreover, we have various experiences like Virtual and Augmented realities, which bring a new dawn to immersive adventure.

According to Lowenstein, Bunuel's films as leading works towards connecting old and new media and revealing the interactivity of Cinema. Even at the dawn of cinema, Bunuel's movies brought us interactivity. However, it is tough to think of cinema as an interactive experience as today. While the audience seems passive while watching a movie, on the contrary, players are primarily in action. And it is tough to say that Cinema is an interactive experience in a world where video games exist. However, surrealism acts and surrealist ways of thinking show how these two mediums are connected in terms of interactivity.

One of the most apparent differences between Cinema and games is the narrative style. Games cannot focus on narrative as movies; their real purpose is not evolving around narrative either. In a narrative sense, this freedom enables an infinite number of realities in the spectators' minds. In games, players create their own story instead. In that sense, games have more common points with art films; the independent film genre focuses on the director's expressiveness. In both games and art cinema, the spectator tries or is forced to involve with the creators' work actively and even interactively. Alexander R. Galloway describes gaming as a start of a new field of its own. "If photographs are images, and films are moving images, the video games are actions." (Galloway, 2006). While this statement is true in a sense, films or photographs can also be actions in Surrealism. Interactivity comes with a more abstract experience and less materialistic orientation, which can be applied to literature, movies, and video games.

In the movie "Un Chien Adalou", the directors symbolize nothing. Instead, Dali and Bunuel create material that summons the spectator's mind to trigger their automatism as a new collaborator, like a third player. For Bunuel, the movie tries to provoke the instinctive reactions of the spectator. However, this interaction is in one way and ends on the spectator's side. A scene created within Bunuel's associations probably ends with irrelevant associations at the spectator's side and completes its journey there. That may be the real difference between art cinema and video games.

In the games, the spectator can affect the material within the endless loop. In Galloway's terminology, photographs and films are actions; games are action and reaction.

Lowenstein tries to analyze and compare Dali's and Bunuel's "Un chien andalou" and the movie eXistence of David Cronenberg to extract elements of interactivity. But before doing that, he explains the works of Roger Caillois to examine the role of play in our culture and society. This explanation may be crucial to understanding the connection between Surrealism and interactivity.

Caillious is a French Sociologist who lived between 1913-1978 and was also part of the Surrealist group for a short period. In his book *Man, Play and Game*, he analysis how playing takes a role in society (Caillois, 1961). The book supports the idea that gaming constructs different social structures. He categorizes games into groups of Agon (Competition), Alea (Chance), Mimicry (Simulation), and Ilinx (Vertigo). Mimicry and Ilinx are significant elements in the connection of Surrealism and games.

According to him, animals' imitative acts (mimicry) don't just aim to provide protection. It also seeks to create a feeling of separating their identity from themselves and their environments. Mimicry is a desire of a creature; that makes them feel they are not the center of the universe anymore but a part of an environment. In a way, mimicry is a meditative act to suppress the horror and loneliness of existing. And according to Caillious, the audience gets into this meditative act while watching a movie in Cinema. They forget the person who entered Cinema saloon and become part of the movie as a character or as a ghost in the movie's universe.

Moreover, he thinks that this mimicry is a degraded version of sacred. In sacred, people suppress their loneliness and feel like part of a bigger universe. Even when we think of old rituals consisting of masks, dances, and synchronized acts, we can see how this resembles mimicry. However, we live in an age where secularization removes the sacred yet more ridicule with it. And in this era, the play takes its place for fulfilling necessities that were once fulfilled by sacred. Caillious finds this sacred feeling in Surrealist art too. He admires Dali's paintings, as the paintings represent the surrealist

understanding of mimicry. In a way, a person looking at the painting transforms themselves into the inside of paintings within the play-act. This perspective enables us to think playing games can also be seen as a substitute of sacred, maybe more than movies and paintings while instructiveness and mimicry are more condensed in during playing games (Adam, 2014, pp. 53-59).

In close-reading of *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999) and *Un chien andalou*, Lowenstein extracts diverse elements that contribute mimicry of spectator and its interactions. While *Un chien andalou* was mentioned as an art movie relatively short, *eXistenZ* can be valued as a Hollywood type of movie where plot architecture is more stereotyped. In the movie *eXistenZ*, the main two characters play immersive games together to resolve the story's central conflict. The movie's importance comes from the director's approach to describing how players interact with video games.

In both movies, connections between characters or associated images between creator and viewer reveal interactivity, which Lowenstein defines as doubled selves. In *Un Chien andalou*, disconnected scenes force the spectator to connect scenes without any logical relation. This is like Dali's double image technique. For instance, two different characters are played by the same actor, or two other scenes are connected by geometric resemblances like spherical shapes (eye and moon). These irrelevant visuals are connected without concerning their effects on narrative logic and invite the spectator to depersonalization through assimilation in space, as Caillois described. Geometrical matching affects spectators' space perception, while character matching affects their identity psychology. In the movie, also irritating images are used, like the opening scene where an eyeball is sliced or ants eating a palm. This irritation creates discomfort within the spectator and diminishes the gap between spectator and screen. This mimicry can be defined as surrealist interactivity, while it uses the subconsciousness of the spectator to connect with them.

In video games, this kind of depersonalization is supplied with the concept of *Avatar* without requiring double image techniques. In games, we don't have to see resembling characters or images that create a chain of association to make us lost in the environment. Games achieve this doubling effect by forcing players to reflect themselves to avatars with direct control and immersion in the environment. In games,

we don't need irritating scenes to get closer to the screen. During play, our reflexes are more involved with the action and create more distinguishable effects on our bodies. That can be defined as action-based interactivity.

In *eXistenZ*, to represent mimicry in games, Cronenberg used techniques that appeared in *Un chien andalou* and other associative methods. In the movie, bio-tech exists, and the audience is exposed to that part with gory details and sexual references. In the movie, people open biological ports on their tails to use full immersive living bio-computer. And we see scenes where a character puts her finger into this port hole, where this port is infected or open surgery of one of that bio-computer with details. Cronenberg uses this irritative technique to make spectators feel how the game is immersive. Character doublings also appear in the movie. The transition of characters between different setups using visually similar characters creates environmental depersonalization in the spectator. Finally, we see geometrical doubling with cinematic effects used in transitions between games or reality to games. In other words, cinematographic techniques and visual elements that Cronenberg uses; are adapted from Surreal interactivity to demonstrate action-based interactivity.

In the movie *eXistenZ*, some scenes create a meaningful question about games. In a scene, the main character does something involuntary, like eating disgusting food. And in the movie, this movement is explained as a "gaming urge", an urge to do something to interact with the game due to the expectations of players. This brings us a question; why are we playing games? In the movie, one of the characters says, "You have to play the game to find out why you play the game." (Cronenberg, 1999). In a simple way, we can say we play the game to have fun. However, this question brings us to how games resemble life itself. It doesn't have an aim until you get into it and challenge yourself. This opens a wide window to include our subconsciousness in the experience while aims become real and really desired by players.

In conclusion Lowenstewin analysis and compare two movies that are fundamentally different but also have common elements. *Un chien Anadolu* illustrates and exposes its audience to surrealist interactivity while *eXistenZ* one shows how video games create action-based interactivity by using techniques of surrealist interactivity that appear in *Un chien Anadalu*. These two interactivities or mimicry are

not completely separated from each other, and there may be huge potential where they intersect.

1.5 Game Mechanics as Surreal Catalysis

This article claims that video games can assist artists and players in having surreal experiences during gameplay. Close reading and analysis of KRZ will reveal features that may create this effect. However, this analysis must be based on previous literature adapted from the art world and game history.

1.5.1 Definition of game mechanics. The game mechanic is a primary term used to analyze a game. Even so, it has been an ambiguous term with more complex definitions brought to games. There are lots of different approaches to defining what are game mechanics by other designers and researchers. This article requires a solid explanation to specify the mechanics that assist surreal experience. In this research definition brought by Miguel Sicart will be used, while he uses a reliable formal approach without excluding different types of games (Miguel, 2008). In the article *Defining Game Mechanics*, Miguel also points out how “Mechanic” is used broadly without absolute definition. While many different pragmatic approaches can be used in the research or development of games, he declares that former definitions do not encompass all complex aspects of games.

The definition of Sicart; game mechanics are methods invoked by agents, designed for interaction with the game state. In this definition, he uses an approach from the computer science field called Object Oriented Programming (OOP). In OOP; classes, methods, and objects are used to create complex architectures, enabling metaphors and a systematic approach to analyze them. Therefore it is also an appropriate tool to analyze games with complex logical relations between game elements. OOP classes can be described as blueprints or shared behaviors through various agents. These agents are represented as objects. Objects are derived from classes and have their unique behaviors and data. However, different things derived from the same class share common behaviors coming from their class. In gaming, this can be seen as game agents like players and non-playable characters. While agents, different NPCs, and players have different abilities or properties, they share common

things related to the game system. Methods are actions that those agents invoke. For example, in a platform game, players and enemies can jump to change their position; however, only the player can interact with checkpoints. In this example, the player and enemy are inheriting methods from the same class but have different methods that enable designers to create complex game systems.

Within this approach, the definition of Sicart becomes more solid. In a game, objects or agents use their methods to interact and change the game state within the game's rules. This definition is comprehensive, while it is purely based on interactivity. Mechanics do not necessarily have to contribute to overcoming the game's challenges. Even games that lack any challenge gets involved in the definition. This is crucial for this article, while surrealist elements come with a lack of logic and try to drive impulsivity which may cause the challenge or aim of a game to disappear.

1.5.2 Narrative game mechanics. The narrative is a controversial term when it comes to game medium. According to the orthodox definition of narrative, it is the construction of a story by telling a series of events sequentially. However, when it comes to games, storytelling methods become more obscure. Marie-Laure Ryan studies the narration of games to create a new definition. According to her, the narrative is not limited to the text. Instead, the narrative is constantly created by the interpreter (Dubbelman, pp. 39-42).

From this perspective, surrealism and games become more coherent due to the fluent nature of surrealism. In surrealism, stories may have shocking and contrasting elements to break the rational thinking mind of spectators and force them to connect their subconsciousness. In surreal stories, the narrative is not rigid. It is more fluid where the reader or audience shapes the story in their way. To open awareness of the spectator for this kind of story construction, some techniques may be used in a story like timeline changes, space absurdity, or character dialogues that are irrelevant to each other. Surrealist narratives do not focus on plot; instead, they focus on characters and mysteries to create a free association among observers.

While surrealist elements try to deceive the human mind in a sense, to trigger subconsciousness, games achieve this within their nature of the activity. In games, the spectator is always in action and constantly generating a reaction to the content. This interactivity makes the text of a game a more spectator-specific experience. Shocking elements, free associations, and our primitive behaviors are triggered during immersive with an active digital environment (Dubbelman).

1.5.3 Poetic game mechanics. With its surprising and unusual nature, poetry has always been a significant part of Surrealism. It enables the artist to reach their audience's minds purely and autonomous way. Surrealism started as a poetic movement, even if it is not limited to the medium. The irrational, metaphorical, and rebellious nature of poetry aligns with the techniques of surrealism that reveal the mystery of subconsciousness (Gliscksber, 1949). These characteristics of poetry can be adapted to games by analyzing them to their compounds.

Diğdem Sezen focuses on combining poetry, gaming, and narrative into a coherent system in her analytic research. She references different artists' definitions of poetry. They describe poetry as a machine of words crafted by poets and operated by the audience. These machines create meaning with readers' involvement and drive them to have an autonomous experience. Sezen points out how this description resembles game systems. She mentions the work of Ian Bogost, which claims good games and good poems are both provocation machines. (Sezen, 2017, pp. 227-230). In her work, she mentions how the usage of metaphors; which connects game mechanics to real-world within shared cultural references through players, still leaves space for interpretation.

Similarly, Alex Mitchell proposes a structure for game designers, where he defines techniques to create poetic effects on games (Mitchell, *Making the Familiar Unfamiliar: Techniques for Creating Poetic Gameplay*, 2016). His research is not directly related to surrealism. Still, he offers practical techniques that create poetic gameplay, which can be beneficial to derive surrealist gameplay from them. He points out three methods: undermining the player's expectation for control, disturbing the chronological flow of time, and blurring the boundaries of the form. He emphasizes defamiliarization as the foundation of poetic gameplay. He suggests that poetic language is formed by disrupting expected patterns of rhyme, rhythm, syntax, and

meaning. Mitchell also has a close reading of *Kentucky Route Zero (KRZ)* that analysis the game from the perspective of defamiliarization and poetic interactions (Mitchell, *Defamiliarization and Poetic Interaction in Kentucky Route Zero*, 2014). He suggests that games that do not follow the general and stereotype language of gaming, resemble analogous use of language in poetry. He refers Jull and Norton; while poetry is not simply communication but also about beauty, a game is not simply accomplishment but also beauty in activity. Mitchell's analysis of KRZ will be used as a guideline in this analysis due to common elements of research fields.

1.6 Collaborative Construction of Realism

Due to the nature of video games in the digital environment, online communication platforms are also very approachable to their players. This enables players to interact with each other and allows the collective creation of the story between them. Serada Alesha mentions this potential strength of modern mediums in her article analyzing common points of *Twin Peaks*, a mysterious series from the 90s, and KRZ (Serada, 2021). Her report mentions how fandoms gather on digital platforms for the first time in history to discuss their theories and extractions. This would opportunity would be the dreams of the Surreal group that see collaborative creation as a root of the Surreal way of thinking.

Twin Peaks has an unclear plot that creates more and more mystery as the show progress through the years. And it has formed a vast solid fanbase since the series's beginning. While director David Lynch also mentions the series as an experience without a definite ending, we can say how they adapt the Surreal way of thinking during the creation of the series (Lynch, 'Twin Peaks' creator David Lynch on his return to the cult show, 2017). This lack of certainty in the plot triggers the fanbase to create a more collaborative discussion platform over the years. KRZ also has this kind of history within its fanbase. Significantly both creations have extended production and release periods that make the mediums more thriving experiences for discussions. *Twin peaks* return to screens after 26 years, and this return was always being discussed among fandoms. Before the series have a break at the end of Season 2, the main character Laura Palmer says to Detective Coupe that they are going to meet 26 years later (Lynch & Frost, *Twin Peaks*, 1990-1994). KRZ also aired for 9 years part by part.

This long air period enables players or spectators to discuss and create their own story which may be invalid after another episode is aired. However, according to David Lynch and the surrealist movement, they don't become invalid, instead, they become another reality through the audience's mind.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on a game while it also tries to adapt concepts, techniques, and aspects from other mediums. Even Kentucky Route Zero (KRZ) can basically be considered a point-and-click adventure, it is not a conventional game within its illogical story, unclear aim, unconventional mechanics, and bizarre world. Since the aim of the research is to analyze games within the perspective of surrealism and extract surreal elements from it, a solid framework is required. This methodology must be proven as a helpful tool for analyzing games from various perspectives. For this purpose, the close reading technique (Jim Bizzocchii & Joshua Tanenbaum, 2011) will be used as a guiding framework during analyzation of KRZ.

1.1 Close Reading

Close reading is a detailed examination, deconstruction, and analysis of a media text (Jim Bizzocchii & Joshua Tanenbaum). Close reading is the continuous creation of meaning, both a creative and destructive process. Due to this nature, they are analyzing a text as formally as possible is not a straightforward process. Reading is a continuous process, and the reader always changes his or her state of mind through the act. Therefore, analytical lenses are required to isolate chunks of meaning. While reading can be seen as an action excluding context, close reading evolved with considering the context of the text. The act of close reading offers an analytical approach that enables the analyzer to criticize the text objectively and provide a different perspective to extract meaning from the text.

Until now, the text has been mentioned as a form of traditional sense, written words on a page. However, text may also be used to refer to spoken dialogues in theatre, acting in film or visual elements in a painting. But those text formats are typically connected to meaning. In the case of games, the meaning of text becomes

more unclear due to the focus of the medium. Former text facets focus on communication and traditional narration. However, games focus on fun, exploration and challenges. Therefore, Bizzocchii and Tanenbaum (Jim Bizzocchii & Joshua Tanenbaum, 2011) describe the text as a form of medium and message. This definition combines the method of medium's narrative methods and the message itself.

Bizzocchii and Tanenbaum's article (2011) provides techniques for close-reading games; they mention challenges one encounters during close reading. These challenges are defined as indeterminacy, scope, and difficulty. In KRZ, particularly scope (gameplay duration of a game) and difficulty won't appear as a problem. The game is a point-and-click adventure game that requires no need for skill. The game has a gameplay duration of 9-13 hours (Kentucky Route Zero, n.d.). However, indeterminacy may be challenging due to the dynamics of games and interactivity. Two different person's experiences cannot be guaranteed the same in terms of encounters or order of meetings. While this is a challenge within this analysis, also it is the foundation of the thesis. As mentioned, surreal elements are assumed to be a product of interactivity and unique experiences of spectators. Indeterminacy is seen as a boosting factor of the surrealist experience. In linear media, indeterminacy also exists within the active creation of human subconsciousness within the perspective of surrealism. I defend games provide another layer of indeterminacy to alter this surreal act. Therefore, indeterminacy is a challenge in this analysis; it is the leading cause.

There are different approaches and roles one can adapt during the close reading. Bizzocchii and Tanenbaum (2011) mention three perspectives of reading for inclusive analysis. This inclusivity would be achieved with an empirical approach in a more powerful way. However, observing gameplay would not give an depth understanding of the game. It would show the interaction of players within the game with more variety. However, while the research topic of this article is about pointing out the connection of game elements within subconsciousness, it would be challenging to reach a pure interpretation of a player within a game, even if not possible, without psychological methodology. Instead, creating different perspective provide more depth deduction about the experience of the game.

Three different approaches are Imagined Naïve Reader, A Performed Player Stereotype, and Usage of Analytical Lenses (2011). A naive reader is a fresh participant who sees the game as exploring new experiences. S/he engages in games within complete surrenders and has no biases about game mechanics, story, art or other game elements. This perspective provides broad observation within play, which an experienced player may ignore. While this approach requires solid creativity and role-playing performance, it is beneficial to understand the game's design errors or immersive experience.

A performed player stereotype creates different types of players to divide gameplay experience into different perspectives. Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum's article (2011) refer to Richard Bartle's player categorization as an example. Bartle (1996) divides player types into killers, socializers, explorers, and achievers. However, this approach doesn't fit KRZ, where it is a more experimental and unique experience. There is no explicit goal in the game, and the game is heavily focused on an exploration of the story.

Moreover, this article focuses on surreal elements in the game, requiring more story and environment immersed player. Killer and achiever types are not applicable for this purpose, while they are more goal-focused stereotypes that contradict surreal experiments. Therefore, this approach won't be used extensively as a methodology for this analysis. But still, during the study, suitable parts may be interpreted differently within different player-type perspectives in a helpful way.

The last approach uses analytical lenses to filter games from different perspectives. In this stage, the play is completed by researchers and starts to be interpreted from different perspectives. It may be seen as a reverse engineering game experience to understand the properties, underlying reasons, methods, and contexts of the game dynamics. These lenses can be used independently but within a connective way and refer to each other. For this research, the lenses applied to the game experience may be altered to represent connection within surrealist techniques. These lenses are described as building blocks in the book *Introduction to Game Analysis* (Fernández-Vara, 2015). Our analytical framework will be based on Fernandez-Vara's analytical lenses in this analysis.

1.2 Building Blocks

Fernández-Vara separates analytical building blocks into three different areas: the context, the game overview, and formal aspects. The context represents existing circumstances during the development and play of the game. Also, the context may consist of other texts and communities that relate to it (Ibid, 14). Context analysis may be crucial to understanding the whole meaning. While some researchers think that text should be analyzed within only its scope, as Fernández-Vara mentions, it may be impossible to see the meaning of a game within a more extensive scope. Especially analysis of KRZ can take advantage of context significantly, while references to other media and cultural themes may become significant for the experience.

A game overview consists of building blocks supporting a summary of the game from different perspectives. It may include content regarding the goal, story, characters, interactions, or basic features. Game is a complex medium, and it is not an accessible or valid thing to summarize it from one dynamic. Even players' motivation varies to play a specific game like; having a relaxed time, immersing with the story, creating social interactions, being a part of a fantasy, or creating empathy with the subjects of the game. The overview elements show possible player relationship paths with the game. Fernández-Vara describes games as uncompleted until the players participate, which supports the idea of this thesis (Ibid, 15). Therefore, the player is also this game's content, and s/he should be part of the text analysis. So their possible interactions with the game should be part of the textual analysis. Fernández-Vara (2015) points out the importance of affordances in describing games. Affordances are all potential freedom player has in the game that is not inhibited by constraints of the game. In other words, affordances are possible interaction methods created by game mechanics. So game overview may also include the game's mechanics to develop a more vivid understanding of the reader.

Formal aspects are identified as construction elements of a text. In literary paragraphs, figures of speeches or word choices can be shown as examples. In a game, formal aspects can be rules, user interface, camera angles, or gameplay types. Fernández-Vara (2015) mentions two kinds of formal aspects adopted from literature;

formalism and structuralism. While formalism aims to define an abstract formulation within text boundaries, structuralism tries to explain more universal patterns on an intertextual level. Fernández-Vara (2015) uses structuralism as her analysis methodology while games follow resembling patterns within their constraints and interaction methods. Moreover, structuralism aims to define surrealist elements with intertextual references to other mediums.

Fernández-Vara proposes various building blocks, some of which are crucial for the analysis, while some are irrelevant. For example, the production period due to the gradual release of the game and audience type due to the experimentalism of the game; are critical, while economic context or technological context is irrelevant for this thesis. Building blocks that are explained in the methodology section will be considered in the analysis section.

1.2.1 Context. During analysis, any relations within the game must be evaluated by considering the research question. These elements constitute the context of the game and provide more broad meaning to the game. In this thesis following factors will be analyzed as context: production team, game genre, socio-historical context, audience, and relations to other media.

1.2.1.1 Production team. Inspecting the production team is a valuable approach to exploring other team works, which may have helpful resources related to the analysis. While it is not always the case, a team has similar styles between their games. We can find connections within the fun and create likely patterns that enable us to describe surreal elements they may apply in their games. Also, the team's background can help reverse the game's engineering production period. Fernandez-Vera (2015) offers the following question to the defined production team:

1. *Who made the game, a team or an individual?*
2. *What other games have been made by this production team?*
3. *How does the game relate to the previous and / or later work of that team?*
4. *Are there any team members whose contribution can be considered to be distinctive? How?*
5. *Are there any collaborators who are artists in other media? What is their contribution to the game?*

1.2.1.2 Game genre. The defining genre of a medium is very beneficial to creating categorization within other artifacts. Still, it is not a straightforward task. Even after the long history of literature and film research, it is still a challenge to define genres. Genres can be more than one. And how the genre is tagged may change according to aims like commercial interests, industrial practices, or academic definitions. To define the genre of a game, formal characteristics of the game and conventions can be used. For example, first-person shooter or point-and-click adventures may be obvious to define due to the player's interaction. However, the theme may be horror or comedy, depending on the visual style, story, or dialogue techniques. While conventions are very helpful in pinpointing genres, they may be very deceptive for experienced players who may ignore them. But conventions also is crucial for this thesis, while breaking conventionality may be used as a tool to create a surrealist experience on the player (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 67,68). Fernández-Vara provides three questions to help define the genre:

- *What genre does the game belong to? According to whose definition?*
- *What features of the game identify it as an example of that genre? Are these features inherent to the game, or are they paratexts?*
- *How does the game break off or subvert the genre it is labeled with?*

1.2.1.3 Socio-Historical context. Socio-Historical context is described as the date the game was released and played. It helps us create a profile for game players and define their expectations. This article references different mediums from different

eras. Therefore historical context is critical to find connections with other works, including surrealist elements (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 74,75). The questions that will be used in this analysis are the following:

- *When and where was the game made?*
- *How does the historical period reflect in the game?*
- *What aspects of the game reflect the culture that produces it?*
- *If the game has been localized, how has it changed from its original version?*

1.2.1.4 Audience. Describing a targeted or adopted audience can help analyze production decisions. It is also related to the economic context, while financial strategy is significant for a game studio. However, considering the financial game plan is out of the research's scope. Still, audience should be analyzed to understand how they interacted with the game while the game provides niche and experimental gameplay. Advertisements strategy, ratings, audience gender, and age may help determine audience type (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 77,78). Additionally, different reviews can be analyzed to create a variety of audiences and how they reacted to the game. The following questions may be used during the determination of the audience:

- *When and where was the game made?*
- *How does the historical period reflect in the game?*
- *What aspects of the game reflect the culture that produces it?*
- *If the game has been localized, how has it changed from its original version?*

1.2.1.5 Relations to other media. As being the newest one in narrative mediums, games have broad possibilities of relationships with other media. Games also have a unique way of adaptations or *transmedia storytelling* due to their interactive nature. *Transmedia storytelling* is the practice of telling a story within the presentation of different aspects of a fictional world (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 80). Video games create the most prominent examples of *transmedia storytelling* while they create imaginary worlds from a simulative perspective instead of a narrative-focused attitude.

Relationship to other media is not limited to the adaptation of a fictional world but also means adapting, being inspired, and referencing various media within the same media artifact. In the analysis of KRZ this may be the case. While the game has its unique media, there may be some references or inspirations from products of other mediums. And as mentioned within previous building elements, analyzing other art pieces may be beneficial while specifying surrealist elements. For this purpose following question will be answered:

- *Is the game inspired by a pre-existing work? How so?*
- *How do the rules of the game relate to the other media artifacts?*
- *How much does the player need to know about the other media in order to play?*
- *What is the role of the player in the game compared to the role of the audience in other media incarnations?*

1.2.2 Game overview. A game overview is a way of telling what is being analyzed. It is an integral part of an analysis. The reader must be familiarized with the game before being exposed to the deductions and results of the study. While an overview may be mistakenly thought of as a summary of the story of a game, like an overview of a novel, it is only a part of overview (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 87). Games are complex systems, and describing gameplay experience is not a simple task.

One of the destructive sides of overview is spoiling the game for the reader. It is a controversial issue within research, but for this thesis, mechanics, twists, or some parts of the story must be mentioned clearly to describe why the experience may be considered surrealist. In this section, some of the building blocks of game overview that Fernández-Vara provides will be described.

1.2.2.1 Game mechanics. Game mechanics are one essential descriptive element of a game. In this analysis, Sicart's definition has been used to describe game mechanics. As mentioned, game mechanics are methods-actions invoked by agents (players or NPCs) designed for interaction with the game state. Determining mechanics may not be an easy task for a game like KRZ. While the game is mainly a point-and-click adventure, one can find different methods for interacting with the game. Since the article seeks a surrealist experience in the gameplay, mechanics play

an essential part. Following questions will be used for that purpose (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 99):

- *What does the player do in the game?*
- *What are the verbs that describe the basic actions?*
- *What are the core mechanics of the game? How are they meaningful?*
- *What actions are less frequent?*
- *How does the player perform the actions in the game?*

1.2.2.2 Fictional world of the game. The game's fictional world is another point to be discussed for overview. Not all games may have a fictional world. However, if there is, defining a fictional world helps us tell the story's setting, mechanics, and theme of the game. Players generally have different experiences from various fictions of other or the same medium. Therefore, the world can be used to appeal to the player by reaching out to their expertise in resembling worlds. This experience or lack of knowledge may shock or trigger the subcounsciousness of the player. Following questions will be used to describe the fictional world of the game (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 105,106):

- *Where does the game take place?*
- *Is the fictional world associated with a specific genre (sci-fi, fantasy, etc.)?*
- *Is the fictional world based on an actual historical setting?*
- *What is the player's role in the fictional world?*

1.2.2.3 Story. The word story is a very controversial concept in games. The story comes out in different forms through different game styles. During analysis story premise should be provided to create an overview. The analysis's focus determines how detailed the story should be mentioned. Fernández-Vara(2015) separates stories as two levels to comprehend a wide range of game story types. She defines the story of the fictional world and the story of the player (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 107). While the story of the fictional world is particular, the player's story may vary with the player's gameplay. The fictional world can be told directly via cutscenes, dialogues, or

exploration elements in games. KRZ is a story-driven game where players discover the world with their exploration. Also, even though the game progress may seem linear, the exploration order affects the player's story and may create a unique story. Surrealism is based on the spectator's perception, so it is essential to discuss the story from different perspectives in search of surrealism in the game. The following questions will be asked in the analysis to define the story of the game:

- *What is the story premise of the game?*
- *Who does the player control (if that is the case)?*
- *What has happened in the fictional world before the game starts? How does it relate to the gameplay of the game?*
- *How do the player's actions constitute events in the game?*
- *What events of the story are told in non-interactive media? Which happen during gameplay?*
- *How does the system of the game bring about story events?*

1.2.2.4 Gameplay Experience. Another building block that tells about the game is the gameplay experience. The gameplay experience tries to describe what playing the game is like. Fernández-Vara (2015) primarily draws attention to the possible subjectivity of gameplay experience. Each player's experience is different. While there are direct actions a player can make, its style and interpretation of the feeling vary a lot. Therefore, in analysis, both direct actions (objective actions) and their possible meanings (subjective actions) must be mentioned to express the gameplay. Due to the nature of this article, it may be crucial to say gameplay directly without any personal comments before trying to extract surrealist elements. Surrealism is an abstract experience and can be defended its existence easily from different perspectives. In this analysis, surrealist methods from other mediums will be used. Also, Mitchell's and Sezen's articles about poetic gameplay may be utilized for methodology. Following questions will be answered to describe the gameplay experience (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 110,111):

- *What is the attitude of the player towards the game? Is it amusing/threatening/scary, etc.?*
- *How does the player respond to the challenges in the game?*

1.2.2.5 Game Communities. Game communities generally become an essential part of a game, especially in multiplayer games or the games that provide creation tools to form communities (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 113). Still, other games may create solid communities and fandoms, especially with marketing department support. As mentioned in the article Serada (2021), KRZ also has a solid fandom page in which theories and interpretations are being discussed (Serada, 2021, p. 4). And these platforms can be very beneficial to increasing the surrealist experience in the game due to power collaboration. The following questions will be answered to analyze the community:

- *Are there groups of players around the game? What tools do they use to get together?*
- *Does the game create a community in its fictional world?*
- *What is the common interest that made the game community get together in the first place? How is it different from other game communities related to the same game?*

1.2.3 Formal Elements. As mentioned before, the structuralist approach will be followed during analysis. This formal methodology tries to create universal generalization and deduction within the scope of other games and products of different mediums. Fernández-Vara (2015) describes traditional elements as deficient tools when used outside of the context of the game and without exploring their relationship with each other. She emphasizes that formal elements help us see the game as holistic and how the game is made but also allow us to understand the interaction of the player with the game. Another warning Fernández-Vara (2015) mentions in her book is the lack of terminology in the field of game design. While the game design area is so young, most words may be adopted from other research, nonacademic discussions, or marketing buzzwords. This may result in unclear descriptions of the elements, like how Surrealism world lost its meaning in popular culture (Fernández-Vara, 2015, pp. 117,118). To prevent this issue, used terminology must be clearly described with

references in the analysis even though the term may be considered typical, like “game mechanics” or “narrative”. Another benefit of formal aspects is the possible relations of game mechanics with the fictional world, which may be a critical point in the analysis of KRZ. Fernández-Vara (2015) provides a series of building blocks to understand the game's formal elements, some of which will be used in the close reading of KRZ.

1.2.3.1 Rules of the world. In games, all fictional worlds are created with rules that enable players to interact with simulation within the boundaries of limitations. Rules of the world are the bridge between gameplay experience and computer system that follows the instruction of designed simulation. In games, the player's allowed action differs from all possibilities that can occur within the simulation. This building block may be crucial for detecting gameplay flow and sudden responses that players may give within the fictional world. Questions will be answered for these elements are following:

- *How does the game world operate independently of player input?*
- *What does the game world allow the player to do? What does the game prevent the player from doing?*
- *What kinds of events and behavior does the game world reward or encourage? Which ones are discouraged?*

1.2.3.2 Diegetic and extradiegetic rules. Another building block of formal elements specifies the game's diegetic and extra-diegetic rules and elements. While diegetic elements belong to the fictional world, extra-diegetic elements are not part of the fictional world. Instead, they are rules and elements that affect only player. Most prominent examples are life counts, achievements, or offered settings elements (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 125). The difference of diegetic and extradiegetic elements may become essential to understand the goal of the player or how they are being manipulated by a designer with subtle game elements. Extradiegetic elements significantly impact the player and, therefore, should be considered during the analysis. The questions that may help to determine diegetic and extradiegetic elements are following:

- *What elements of the game do the inhabitants of the world sense and respond to?*
- *What actions are explained as a narrative event? Which ones are not?*
- *Which rules are associated with an event in the world and which are regulated in a menu?*

1.2.3.3 The gap between the player and the game: mediation. During gameplay, the player interacts with the game via various elements like the user interface, the point of view, or the game world. Fernández-Vara (2015) defines these interactions as mediations. Mediations create a feedback loop between player and game. An example of mediation would be the item inventor system in an RPG game, where the player can choose a specific item from their inventor and assign them to their character. Mediations enable the player to manipulate the game. Manipulations can be separated into two groups: direct and indirect manipulations (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 142). Direct manipulations are players' actions that are responded to by the game immediately, like jumping with a jump button. Indirect manipulations are actions that do not trigger a sudden change in a game. These manipulations require communication with the player as the responses are not intuitive. For example, the walking command in point-and-click adventure games, where the player clicks on a point and the character tries to walk towards it considering environmental obstacles, creates a flow of communication. In case that point is unavailable, the game rejects that action with feedback, or in case of a valid point, the player observes what kind of reactions will be triggered during the period of walking. Mediations are essential elements in this analysis due to provided classification of player's interactive experience. Fernández-Vara (2015) provides following questions for this classification:

- *What is the point of view of the game?*
- *How does the point of view provide a role for the player?*
- *What are the on-screen elements that give information to the player on how to play the game?*
- *How does the player intervene in the fictional world? Does the interface use direct manipulation or indirect manipulation?*

1.2.3.4 Representation (visual design, sound design, and music). Video games adapt sound, music, and visual elements to support their experience. While they increase the game's aesthetic, they can also be used to alter game dynamics. For instance, music rhythm can be changed depending on an opponent's closeness in a stealth game where the player hides from her opponents to overcome them. Color coding may enable the game to teach a rule of a game without a strict tutorial. This methodology can be seen in films like Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014) movie, where non-diegetic scores support the narrative context (Carlsson, 2019). In this analysis, the player's perception will be focused on, and audiovisual presentation would be very significant to understand that perception. The following questions will be answered to analyze the audiovisual aspect of the game:

- *How do the audiovisual aspects of the game indicate what the game is about?*
- *How does the audiovisual design provide cues for interaction or help understand what is going on in the game?*
- *How do the audiovisuals take advantage of the technology of the game?*
- *How does the game evoke the aesthetics of other media/other games/other platforms?*

1.2.3.5 Levels and level design. Level design is another critical building block of analysis. Levels are fragments that create the game, like how words create poem and shots creates film (Fernández-Vara, 2015, p. 155). While there are many aspects of level design, for this analysis, only some of them will be considered because of the

style of the game. Levels are small goals that drive the player. It separates the game into sections.

Moreover, it also creates a narrative design and enables designers to direct within a specific road. In this analysis, considering level design would also help us understand different structures each player may encounter, which also alters the experience. Questions that will be used for the analysis of level design are the following:

- *How is the space segment defining the level?*
- *How does the level communicate to the player what to do?*
- *Does the level try to integrate gameplay and story? Or is the story separate from the players' actions (e.g., using cut-scenes)?*
- *How does the environment relate to the story of the game? How does the level construct a story for the player?*

1.3 Other Research Techniques

Exploring surrealist elements in a game has no clear path. In this analysis, all commentary on game elements must be supported with objective logic and referencing other works. For this goal, research from the literature will be used to find a supportive argument. Poetic gameplay, surrealist interactivity, collaborative creation, and surrealist techniques are possible supportive areas for the analysis. Each game mechanic or feature claimed as a surrealist element will be supported with a reference. This analysis will help us create an objective set of techniques that can be used in future works in game development.

1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, three different approaches will be used in this analysis. Fernández-Vara's (2015) building blocks will be used to analyze the game from various perspectives of game field (Fernández-Vara, 2015). The gameplay will be played and interpreted as a Naïve player and different player types proposed by Jim Bizzocchii & Joshua Tanenbaum (2011). At last supportive practices and arguments

of Alex Mitchell, Digidem Sezen, and Adam Lowenstein will be used to support the ideas.

CHAPTER 4

THE ANALYSIS

The format of the analysis will be divided into two sections. The first one is the informative part that provides context and an overview of the game, which will be presented in the shape of the scope of the article. This part will focus on and discuss potential surreal aspects of the game. Each perspective may provide an understanding of how a building block can assist in achieving autonomous and surrealistic gameplay. In the second part, surreal elements will be pointed out and discussed. The first chapter will be grouped within the building blocks Fernández-Vara provided. However, the second part will be grouped within different types of methodological approaches that help us define the surrealist elements. Art literature, other game-related studies, and analytical analysis of the game moments will be used to describe and explain surrealist elements in the game.

1.1 Definition of Surrealist Element

The term surrealist element is used frequently and requires solid definition before being identified in the game. A surrealist element is a game component that either mimics a technique applied in another art product that provides a surreal experience or a game component that breaks the line between the player's reality and the game's dreamy experience. Letter concept may be confused with immersivity. Immersivity means the engagement or involvement a person feels by playing a digital game (Paul Cairns, Anna Cox, A. Imran Nordin, 2014). However, with a surreal element, the player is triggered to get involved with the game where game reality is not solid. This ambiguity of reality in the game simulates the feeling of being detached from reality. Since mimicking approach is a dogmatic method due to acceptance techniques of other artworks without questioning, the references must be questioned within provided literature. The term game component can be anything defined as building blocks like a game mechanic, level design, or audiovisual representation.

1.2 Kentucky Route Zero

1.2.1 The game. KRZ is a point-and-click adventure game developed by Cardboard Computer and published by Annapurna Interactive (Cardboard Computer, 2016-2020). The game is focused on storytelling and exploration of the fictional world with branching dialogues and actions. In the game, small unconventional puzzles are generally shaped with conversation trees and pathways. However, these puzzles do not challenge the player. Instead, the game provides complex dialogues, an impressive atmosphere, and magical storytelling to emphasize mysteries. One of the designers, Jake Elliott entitles this approach as designing puzzles instead of puzzles (Elliott, 2013). The game had been released separated into five acts and additional interludes. Acts provide a linear storyline while interludes pass in different timelines and from other characters' points of view. In seven years span, these acts are released one by one. The game was released for Linux, Microsoft Windows, and OS X; later, it was ported to Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One.

This analysis will consider different parts of the game from other acts and interludes. The game will be played in Microsoft Windows with mouse input. All actions and interludes will be played within the order provided by the game. Also, a non-commentary gameplay video will be used for the repetitive analysis of the game (Valori, 2021).

1.2.2 Production team. The game was developed by Cardboard Computer company with the publishment of Annapurna Interactive. Cardboard Computer consists of Jake Elliott, Tamas Kemenczy, and Ben Babbitt. Jake and Tamas are an old friend who was enthusiastic with creating art with computers. Both have a multi-disciplinary background with experimental music, installations, theater, web, visual art, and games. Their long partnership has formed their taste in creation. Jake talks about their diverse previous works in GDC talk (2013) and emphasizes how both were obsessed with creating art with technology. One of these works is an experimental chat room where various noises are mixed into conversations like ASCII characters or random images. This application makes people collaborate on an ambiguous platform like surrealist techniques mentioned in this article. Metroidvania games inspire their previous games; side scrolled non-linear action-adventure games.

1.2.3 Game genre. KRZ is a point-and-click adventure game that adopted an old-style layout. The store page describes the game as a “magical realist adventure game” (Computer, 2020). The game is not a big-budget game, which also labels it as an indie production that enables the studio to create an unconventional gameplay experience. While proposing the term Indie as a genre may seem ambiguous due to the high budget of game productions, Indie means a genre where studios can dare to create unique game experiences due to relatively low production costs. KRZ fits this experimentalism within its story, interaction methods, sound design, and visual design.

The game pushes the player into a complex and ambiguous series of incidents and dialogues within its magical atmosphere so that mystery can be used as a subgenre of the game. Also, the game has many references to different art mediums and adapted applications from genres of Southern Gothic fiction and techno mysticism (HUDSON, 2020). Most mechanics are oriented around dialogues; text triggers, actions or situation descriptions. High usage of text dynamics makes the game fall into interactive fiction category.

1.2.4 Audience. KRZ is a niche game that addresses a specific type of player. Still, this uniqueness also creates strong audience acceptance. KRZ has been discussed and theorized among its fans since the release of the Act I (Serada, 2021). Especially the fact that the initial game budget formed with crowdfunding and the game was being released arc by arc has created a progressive and dynamic fan base. The first arc had released in 2013, in an age when indie games peaked and were appreciated by a diverse audience. The beginning of the 2010s was an era where indie games had their peak. The popularity of Steam and Itch.io enabled people to appreciate experimental games and motivated players to look for different experiences other than mass production games (Baker, 2018). Therefore, the initial popularity of KRZ formed within this indie goldrush and continued for seven years until the last act was released. This popularity was one of the elements for the collaborative creation of players. This type of creation process was discussed in Surrealist techniques. Through online communities, discussion and fandom, the experience gets out of the game and becomes a co-created surreal experience.

1.2.5 Relations to other media. KRZ has been influenced by different media and has various references to American culture, painting, literature, etc. For instance, the Márquez family in the game is named after Gabriel García Márquez, the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This reference is strengthened by adopting a name from the book, and it is used as the name of the family's location, “100 Macondo Lane”. Another example of direct reference to the game is an adaption of the painting “Le blanc-seing” by René Magritte. In one of the scenes in the game, we see a parallax effect used in a forest environment, which creates a strongly resembling view of the painting.

Besides direct references, KRZ is inspired by theater techniques and scenography. Scenography is the practice of dealing with every aspect of the environment and atmosphere of stage crafting. In one of the GDC talk, Tamas Kemenczy, a game designer, describes how the scenography approach is holistic and considers different aspects of the text (Kemenczy, 2016). He references the book of Pamela Howard, a director and scenographer, “What is Scenography?”. He demonstrates how scenes are built like theatrical scenes considering light, environmentally sound design, and architecture. The locations of KRZ are relatively static and focused on creating an atmosphere. These techniques trigger feelings like sublime, disturbance, peace, or fear, which are helpful to develop surrealist flow in the player.

Moreover, fandom discussions may point out the intertextuality of the game with other media. Serada describes this phenomenon as an “intertextual landscape” (Serada, 2021). These intertextual references are not necessarily true or objective. Instead, they provide common topics, objects, or motifs between texts, even the creators of the text have no intention to create those relations. This kind of intertextuality does exist because the audience creates it. In that sense, KRZ resembles *Twin Peaks*, a drama series from the 90s (Lynch & Frost, *Twin Peaks*, 1990-1994). *Twin Peaks* was the first example where collaborative interpretation is made through the new internet age. People were creating new theories and relations by considering other texts from history. The intertextual landscape serves as a surrealistic experience with the power of collaboration.

1.2.6 Game mechanics. On the surface, KRZ has simple mechanics. The most apparent mechanics are navigating avatars and going into conversations with NPCs. Mouse clicks make navigation and movement can be within three dimensions. Players can interact with specific objects with a mouse through a controlled avatar. Conversations, multiple options, and dialogues are designed as they are meant to be chosen not strategically but arbitrarily. Some of the choices in the game are permanent, like naming the main character's dog, while these decisions do not alter the storyline. Players can navigate between scenes using the map of the region. Generally, in the game, the player controls the avatar within the 3D dimension, but when the player switches to the map interface, the avatar becomes a wheel sprite, and the whole world appears as white lines on a black canvas. Players can travel as they intended on this map and navigate through scenes freely. While these mechanics are apparent, as players progress through the game, different mechanics occur, like traveling through a non-Euclidian road named Highway Zero or riding a bird on the main map.

For instance, in the interlude named Limits And Demonstrations, the conversations of different spaces tangle each other and create a meta experience. At one of the exhibits, the player controls the choices of a game character which is also an interactive audio adventure. While, at first glance, this action seems like the game's main text-driven mechanic, it becomes a hypertext-style game. These mechanics are crucial in searching for surrealist techniques and will be exposed in the next part of the analysis.

1.2.7 Story. KRZ is a story-driven game where the player reveals the story with talking characters, interacting with game space and objects. For the scope of this article, the whole story can't be and is not had to be comprehended completely. But the basic plot and some parts of the story must be revealed to make an analysis.

The game starts with one of the main characters, Conway, as he drives into a gas station with his truck. His dog accompanies him. As the player controls Conway and talks with other people, it is revealed that he is hired to make a delivery to address 5 Dogwood Drive and he is lost while traveling around Interstate 65 in Kentucky. This delivery defines the main objective of the game. However, the story does not mainly focus on this objective. Throughout the game, players find themselves in a position

where they don't consider the delivery too much. Instead, the competition drives the player to focus on momentary objectives, dialogues, and actions like traveling a mine with a new character to help her, having a conversation with a stranger, or finding a method to fix a computer. To be more explicit, this side story logic does not resemble conventional story designs where player enjoys small side stories within the main story. It is more like whole story fragments are designed to create a distraction on the player from the main objective and story.

In surrealism, the narrative should not be solid and decisive. It should be more dynamic and moldable to enable spectators to create their own free-associative realism. KRZ brings out this kind of story in which players are able to find gaps to create their own realm of realities. In the game, characters that are being controlled change a lot which also creates different tones within different character dialogues. Each character has their own style with their own concerns. The player does not learn the depth of the backgrounds of the game characters since the player can immerse with those characters due to a small piece of experience they have with them.

KRZ uses flashforwards and flashbacks a lot. Usually these scenes would support the story to create more solid meaning and fill the gaps. However, KRZ uses these time dimensions to establish characters from different perspectives. Even in the game, these scenes do not have to be in the same reality. For example, a character named Lula Chamberlain is one of the central characters the player encounters in different forms. First, she is introduced as the exhibition artist in the Interlude between Act I and Act II. In Act II, the player sees her as an office worker who helps the player to find their way. Then in the interlude between Act II and Act III, players play as an audience of a theater play called "Entertainment, " also written by Lula Chamberlain. In Act III player visits a bar where the theater play's story passed. While the bar is initially introduced as a theater element, it becomes the reality of the main storyline in the game. All these story elements gather around Lula Chamberlain, pushing the player's imagination to a more accessible and fluent state.

1.2.8 Gameplay experience. KRZ has straightforward gameplay in terms of interactions. Player points and clicks to the places wherever s/he want to go or whomever s/he intends to speak. From a technical perspective, the game does not challenge players to present hard puzzles or skill-required game elements. However, it challenges story incidents and character dialogues. From the first level, the player encounters obscure dialogues and characters. The Player is constantly forced to create connections within different scenes and dialogues to interpret the fictional world. The whole game consists of mysteries, continually challenging the audience with obscurity. Of course, this may not be considered challenging if the player does not relate to dialogues and the story. The game does not prevent players from proceeding if they don't follow the story. But with this gameplay style, the game becomes dull and meaningless to be played. This comment may be subjective since it assumes the experience of an imaginary player. However, without player-story interaction, the game does not provide any gameplay mechanics that rewards or punishes the player.

While the gameplay does not change through Acts, every interlude provide a different gameplay experience. This dramatic variation in gameplay supports players' challenges during communication with the game world. For instance, the interlude "The Entertainment" provides a POV camera between Act I and Act II. In the section, players can only look around and listen to the dialogue between characters. S/he can not move or choose a character to have a dialogue. Instead player becomes like an unimportant character who only observes the scene. At first glance, the whole set may interpret as an irrelevant story from the main game. But in "normal" gameplay, the player encounters one of the characters from this scene.

This mystery narrative is the real game challenge, which players must solve in their own way during the gameplay.

1.2.9 Rules of the world. World of KRZ provides a simulation that enables the player to walk around, interact with a limited number of objects and talk with other characters. It has a simple representation of human daily life and communication. Since the world provides its unique fantastic set of rules like Highway Zero, a child that can fly a giant eagle, or factory workers that are skeletons, this divergence from

reality gradually forms through the game. Therefore, the player questions the world and what may be possible in the future.

Especially elements commonly used as extra-diegetic may be presented in the game as diegetic. For instance, in the game, scores are being played with the accompaniment of an orchestra that is seen as figures near the camera clip. The camera zooms in towards a cave through a house's window when entering Highway Zero for the first time. In the scene, the player sees the character standing in the place suddenly appear in the truck at the cave entrance. In this scene, it is uncertain how our characters enter Highway or how players' perspective changes, and how players should relate all the actions which each other. There is no line between where player and characters are separated and which elements are extra-diegetic or diegetic. This is another supporting surrealist element in the game where it constantly forces the player to question the reality of the game.

1.2.10 The gap between the player and the game: mediation. KRZ has a third-person point of view. Players can see a broad environment around the scene in one frame. The game provides different sets of action with clickable icons in levels. This way of indication helps to direct the player as an intended way through the game.

The movement is not directly in the game; instead, players can only click to the point they want to go and wait for their character to arrive. This creates a gap between the player's action and the game's feedback. This design decision supports the player to stay in the scene's mood and the environment. Smooth camera movements that follow the controlled characters create cinematographic views. This became more obvious with the environment design of the developers. KRZ uses perspective within various discrete angles that designers choose. These perspectives are specially selected to put the player in specific perceptions (Kemenczy, 2016). In other words, indirect movement and locked camera perspectives create a dreamy space between game and player where players can fill that with their chain of thoughts.

1.2.11 Representation (visual design, sound design, and music). KRZ has its unique visual design. The game uses flat-shaded materials in its artwork. The character has silhouette faces and a simple outfit. While production budget may have been one of the reasons for this kind of art style, it perfectly fits the dreamy and mysterious atmosphere of the game. Moreover, the flat-shaded visuals make the frames more like paintings.

Sound design mainly consists of environmental sounds. There are no sounds to indicate dialogues of the character. However, environmental sounds are designed and placed selectively. Every part of the scene has unique sounds that describe what kind of environment the player is in. These sounds are blended within the position change of characters. Most of these environmental sounds are monotone. Additionally, character movement triggers a different set of sounds like footstep or squeak that are also placed as monotone. This repetitive sound creates a hypnotic effect on players and makes them open to being involved with surrealist elements.

One of the distinct scenes of KRZ, are choice-based music concert. In that scene, the player can choose which song the singer should sing. Visuals, music rhythm, and level design create a unique experience. Still, this scene can make the player feel unnatural or pushed experience due to technical difficulty. Choices are too strict and repetitive, which may prevent players from describing their imaginative music. However, a more sophisticated version of this gameplay could create a perfect environment for automatism and surreal experience.

1.2.12 Levels and level design. As mentioned, the game structure is separated into acts and interludes in theater style. Each show is separated into different scenes. The game offers sand-box style freedom to the player. The player can travel within different scenes as they intended. But with structured level design, this freedom becomes restricted virtually as the player constantly is being directed. While the gameplay style slightly differs through different acts, in most of the game, the direction that proceeds the story is being told from the perspective of the camera, game feedback, and environmental design. In the case of KRZ, the level design is crucial for preventing players from being lost in non-rigid stories. There are many points where

dialogues, scenes, and actions become ambiguous, and it is straightforward to lose the aim of the game from the player's perspective.

In Act IV, there is a river journey where the player directs their boat within the interface used for traveling in the game. At each stop, the unrelated dialogue appears and makes players forget what they were doing in the first place within the game. This kind of sudden change happens a lot throughout the game, and it helps to mix the player's feelings, which also assists in autonomous thoughts and free associations. However, without a structured level design, the game can become nearly impossible to play and would lose its story flow.

1.3. Surreal Elements In The Game

1.3.1 Poetic and unfamiliar gameplay. Alex Mitchell suggests that defamiliarization creates "poetic interaction" in a game. When players are shocked by the experience, their perception becomes prolonged. These elements also let players have their autonomous thought processes, enabling them to construct their reality. Alex Mitchell has his analysis on KRZ that emphasizes poetic gameplay. In the study, he explains how the game creates an illusion of being a stereotype puzzle game; but soon afterward, how the game overthrow this own manifestation and shows that there is no puzzle to solve in the game (Mitchell, *Defamiliarization and Poetic Interaction in Kentucky Route Zero*, 2014).

The game starts as normal click-and-point adventure game with dialogue trees. Supposedly the game's main character, Conway stops at a gas station to ask the way of his delivery point. The guy at the gas station sends Conway to the basement of the building to switch on the electricity. So he will be able to search his way with the computer. This setup defines our character's short- and long-term mission and declares what kind of gameplay is forming. However, as the player proceeds through the game, it becomes evident that the choices made don't affect the game. For example, in the first scene, there is a moment where the player tries to guess the password of the computer, which is presented as three different poet lines. But it doesn't matter which of the lines is selected as the computer is unlocked at every choice. This kind of moment changes the player's perception slowly. The first illusion of a game is that a puzzle game dissolves, and the player starts to think that the game is all about the interactive story. However, this perception also becomes invalid while the game's plot

is more ambiguous in each scene. The first long-term aim is finding “5 Dogwood Drive”, the destination of the pack Conway tries to deliver; it becomes less important. Each dialogue and scenes provide more and more unrelated incidents. At some point, the player does not remember the purpose of the game, which switches the perception of a story game towards a game having no purpose except interactions.

As mentioned in the movie *eXistenZ* (1999); “You have to play the game to find out why you play the game”. Without any definite purpose, the player just focuses on interactions and moments in the game. With constant unfamiliarity that arrives from sudden changes in the game and momentary gameplay creates a huge opportunity to have surrealist experiences. The player doesn’t think about the whole aim or story and can’t get in the flow of mindless gameplay due to dramatic changes in game mechanics. This pure state of gameplay which is not easy to achieve in stereotype games, provides tools and triggers for the player to create their realities. This state of mind is not easily accepted by spectators while forcing them to think deeply. However, KRZ achieves that state slowly and with false promises. In that way, it attracts players with interesting interactions. This can be seen as parallel with the Cinema experience Breton claims. While Cinema is a place that can trigger a surreal experience due to the big screen, crowd, and powerful auditory setup, games can start this kind of experience with mystery gameplay and interactions.

1.3.2 Doubling mechanics. In surrealism, the formation of doublings is used as an instrumental tool that triggers audience consciousness. Dali adapted doubling with his “double images” technique. Directors like David Lynch, Alfred Hitchcock, and David Cronenberg exploit that in their movies as hidden in plots, characters, and cinematography (Creed, 207). Doubling techniques challenge the audience by unraveling different contexts of the same presentations. Fluent meaning of the same things puts the mind of the audience, in a more transient state where their subconsciousness is triggered to create new meanings and realities. In KRZ doubling shows up through the game in different forms.

1.3.2.1 Limits and demonstrations. The first interlude *Limits And Demonstrations* is a great application of doubling. In the scene, three new characters are presented to the player. Characters are in an exhibition of a retrospective of Lula

Chamberlain, an artist and a future character appearing in the game. The scene starts with a wall text that introduces works of Lula Chamberlain with a meaningful note at the end: “Are we capable of viewing these works as they were meant to be viewed? Do we even have to?”

In the scene, the player examines each installation of Lula Chamberlain. One of the installations is an interactive audio story. This installation is a mix of real-life work; Random Access by Paik and Choose Your Adventure book by Edward Packard (Mitchell, Defamiliarization and Poetic Interaction in Kentucky Route Zero , 2014). At the installation, a web of tape bands is attached to the wall like a map. Exhibition visitors can start to listen to those bands by rubbing a tape player along them. In the game, the player controls a character named Emily. Alongside, two friends of hers tour the museum whose names are Bob and Ben. In the installation audio story installation, there are also three characters named Lula, Donald, and Joseph. The audio story is being told by Lula as a diary. The visitor can branch the story according to the options offered by the story. This is a branching meta game that appears in another dialogue branching game.

The player controls Emily, who decides to branch into the audio story while also having dialogues with Bob and Ben. In the beginning, player commands what Emily decides between branches that are provided by the audio story, like:

-COMPUTER: To lean on Joseph's shoulder, rotate seventy degrees, and advance eleven inches. To take Donald's hand, rotate two-hundred-and-seventy degrees and reach two inches.

***[Option 1]** -EMILY: Lean on Joseph's shoulder*

***[Option 2]** -EMILY: Take Donald's hand*

However, slowly player switches to command Luna – the POV character in the audio story - through Emily without noticing the transition. During this transition, the whole scene fades into a black screen slowly to emphasize dialogues and make players forget the space they are in. Here we see three doubled characters within different

realities. The player loses boundaries by switching between them, altering their perception to have a more fluent state of mind.

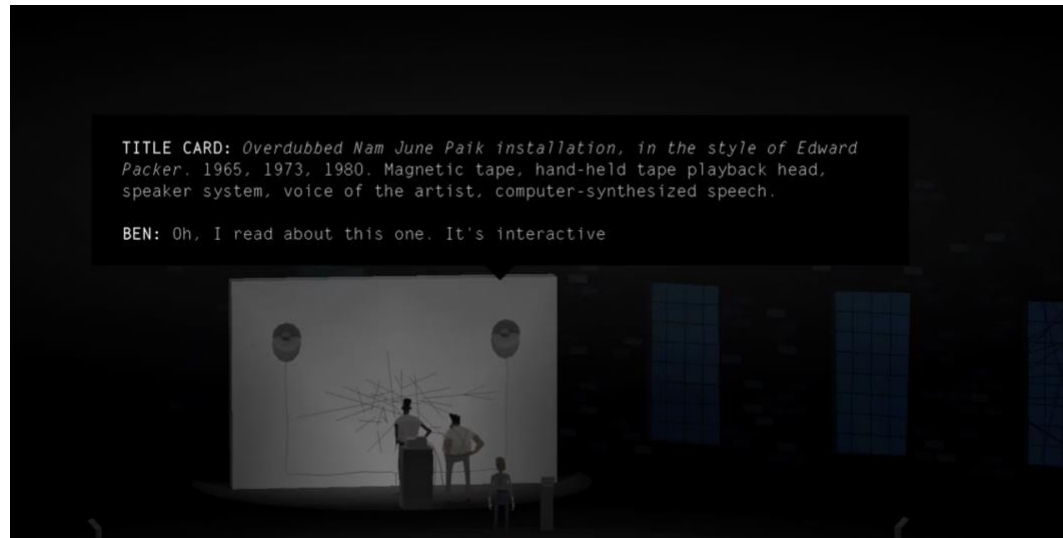


Figure 1: A scene from *Interlude Limits And Demonstrations*. Characters are observing one of the installations of Lula Chamberlain.

1.3.2.2 Control doubling. In the first scene of Act III – Museum of Dwellings, Conway got his new leg, mutilated in Act I. Since mutilation, Conway was only being controlled slow-paced by the player. However, after Conway’s leg is restored, this is the moment where the player can control Conway at a fast pace. In the scene, Conway, Shannon, the dog, and Ezra (a child they met in Act III) are standing in a parking lot near Conway’s truck. When players move, they notice a sudden speed change at Conway’s movement control.

Since the scene has a wide area to move, it invites the player to run in the parking lot with a drastic speed change. While Conway is running in the parking lot, Ezra appears on the screen running as well with a childish attitude. In this running sequence, the game switches the player’s control to Ezra in a subtle way. The camera slowly moves to the point where Ezra is at its center. This control switch between characters is not definite since it is being smoothly canceled when the player stops to run. However, if the player continues to run due to the control switch, a harmonistic movement appears between Ezra and Conway. Until this point in the game, Conway has always been reflected as a sick and old guy. But this control shift reveals his young version as he runs with a childish attitude like Ezra’s. The player can easily miss this mechanic while the switch dynamic is subtle and not persistent. However, even player

does not understand the change. The game uses doubling of controls to narrate Conway's new status, a younger and healthier version of him.



Figure 2: Conway and Ezra are running. In this scene control changes dynamically between these two characters.

1.3.3 Magical realism as trigger. Magical realism is a sub-genre where a realistic world setup is mixed with magical elements. It is one of the strongest genres of KRZ. Magical realism is a different genre than surrealism since magical realism is a constraint on reality, and surrealism is unbounded by the power of dreams. However, they have common points in offering impossible narratives in the form of realities. Magical realism puts its magical elements into our dull and simple life in the form of non-surprising incidents. In this genre, characters accept all kinds of weird incidents with a casual attitude. In games, magical realism can create an opportune setup to trigger a surreal experience for the player. With magical elements accepted, as usual, players become more likely to imagine outside of the scope of realism provided by the game. It creates a feeling of acceptance of limitless possibilities that may occur in the game and makes players dare to imagine more freely. Of course, magical realism is not a sufficient trigger for a surreal experience. But in the scope of KRZ, magical realism becomes a great tool to attract players' attention to free associations that may occur in the game with its "reality". Magical realism illustrates the power of realism by telling unrealistic events as realistic, so the audience does not hesitate about them (Ayyub Rajabi¹, Majid Azizi², Mehrdad Akbari³, 2020, p. 7).

1.3.3.1 Bears in bureau of reclaimed spaces. Bureau of Reclaimed Spaces is a place a player in ACT II crosses. It is a service building that stores addresses that can be used for new purposes. In the game, Conway, Shannon, and the dog visit to find their destination, Dogwood Drive. The camera's perspective in the scene is placed as more than one floor is visible from the side. The building floors consist of: *Floor 1: Clerks' Office; Floor 2: Conference Room; Floor 3: Bears; Floor 4: Archives and Records; Floor 5: Diagrams and Drafts*

Floor 3 is a strange place in a serious building with lots of paperwork and businesspeople on its other floors. The floor has many bears standing on it with vines hanging from the ceiling. Players can go to that floor and walk through the bears without getting harmed. This weirdness is not mentioned in the story as a strange thing. Even on the elevator tag, it is written as Bears for floor 3. This poetic scene can be interpreted as a metaphor, where bears symbolize business life's brutal experience. But it may also be seen as irrelevant strange elements that shatter reality rules in the player's mind. This is a supportive image to create an acceptance of an unrealistic setup in the player's mind.



Figure 3: Bears on Floor 3 of Bureau of Reclaimed Spaces

1.3.3.2 Where the strangers come from. In Act III, Scene 13; a flashback shows previous incidents in the game. The flashback game reveals what happened when Shannon and Conway went away into a hut while other characters -and also players-

were waiting for them in the forest. The scene occurs in an underground whiskey distillery center managed by Strangers, glowing skeleton people. The skeleton image became more meaningful in this scene. In contrast, the image was forecasted in previous scenes, like when Conway's leg morphed into a skeleton leg after a doctor treated it and when two skeletons appeared on a camera record. The whole scene is made of unrealistic elements without a strangeness that is observed by the characters. In the scene, the player starts to control a Stranger named Dolittle, the distillery manager. Dolittle offers a factory tour to Shannon and Conway without indicating any reason. In the scene, the player can drive a factory car and visit the factory's digital center, an area full of burning caskets used for distillation and whiskey storage. All of the dialogues happen with serious attitudes. During the tour, Dolittle shows Conway a truck, asks him to analyze parts of the truck, and makes him meet with the team through radio. At the end of the tour, Dolittle offers Conway a glass of whiskey. After he drinks whiskey, Dolittle congratulates Conway on his new job as a factory truck driver. Shannon reacts to this news with shock, and she says that he will not work for them. However, Dolittle says that Conway has a huge debt due to the high price of whiskey that he just drank. After flashbacks, Conway says to the group that he has to accept the offer due to his debt.



Figure 4: Conway, Shannon, and Dolittle looks around in casket area

The whole scene is a perfect example of magical realism. There is no logical element in the scene in terms of the reactions and dialogues of the characters. However, all scenes are accepted as reality by the characters, and the player slowly adapts to this

weirdness throughout the scene. Even why Strangers are formed by skeletons, or in what way skeletons are related to Conway's leg; the scene's attitude forces the player to accept reality. As mentioned, this kind of scene does not consist of surrealist elements and does not directly trigger the player to have subconscious imagination. However, it makes the whole game experience more open and coherent to surrealist activity that is triggered by other elements mentioned in this analysis.

1.3.3.3 Ezra, Julian, and the forest. Ezra is one of the main characters appearing towards Act II's end. He is a small child who rides a big Bird named Julian. He appears in the scene called "Museum of Dwellings." Museum of Dwellings is a neighborhood that is converted into a museum presenting homes. The residents of the neighborhood still live there and stay as a part of the presentation. At the end of the museum Conway, Shannon, and the dog meet with Elza and Julian. Elza lives in a forest, but he comes to the museum every night to transport residents to the forest for a night's sleep because residents are not comfortable sleeping at night. At the end of the scene "Museum of Dwellings," Julian took Ezra and the team and started to carry over Kentucky.

In KRZ, Ezra becomes a team member after he appears in the game. He is presented as a strong, independent, and free child whose family is lost one night and left in a forest with the big bird Julian. He appears as a savior of the team, offering a ride to their destination with no road to drive. After the Museum of Dwelling, the team lands in the forest, and here player starts to control Ezra. Ezra runs in the forest, which he comes across different timeline versions of Cannon and Shannon talking intimately about their situations or life.

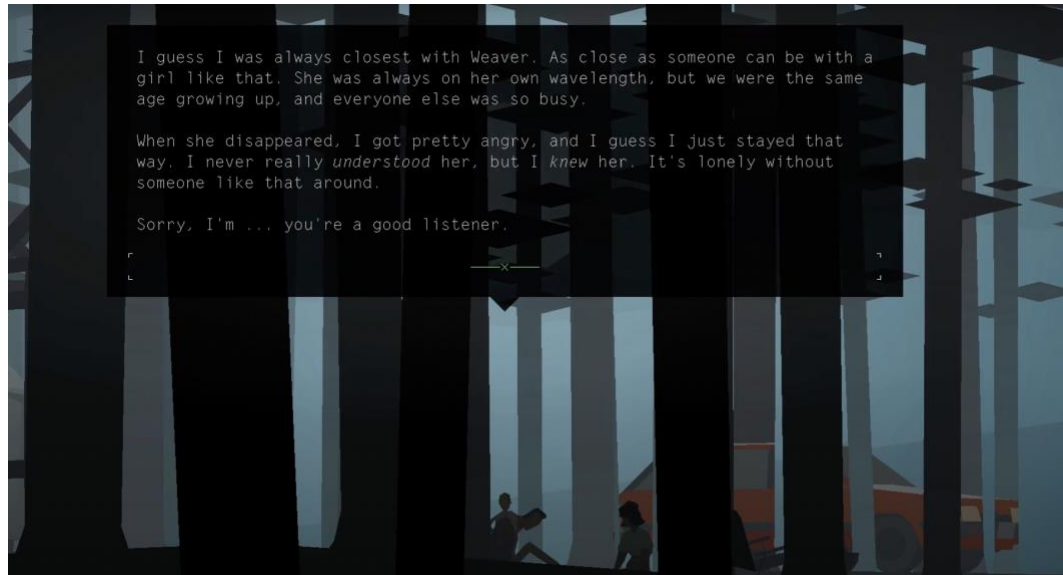


Figure 5: Ezra listens to the dialogue between Shannon and Conway in the forest

The whole forest scene is presented as fabular. The player plays an eccentric character who acts like a child and grows up. The Player observes the serious situation of Shannon and Cannon from the perspective of Ezra, creating a feeling of being a mythical character. This is one of the best examples of magical realism in the game. The player becomes an observer of the main characters, who are dealing with the hard reality of life that includes health conditions, lost relatives, and daily jobs from a magical perspective. This perspective disturbs players' perception of reality effectively and makes them open to all possibilities.

1.3.4 Change of perspective and mimicry. Mediums create a unique position for spectators in their narrative. In fiction, there are multiple viewpoints, like first and second, which are categorized according to the spectators' perspective. This can dynamically change in narrations, and their definition can be disturbed through the medium. In art history, innovative approaches created a different perspective for spectators, like a disarranging timeline or breaking forth walls. Altering perspective is an excellent tool for shocking the audience. When the position of the spectator changes, this suddenly forces them to reconstruct the story. This reconstruction may also come with changes in the narrative's meaning or feeling and result in a new realism. A familiar character may become a stranger, or a side character may turn into a protagonist. Although this change is not necessary to bring surrealist activity, it may become a robust technique for surrealist activity in a coherent setup and context.

KRZ creates changes in perspective in multiple scenes with shocking effects. Mitchell mentions these scenes as elements that defamiliarize the audience (Mitchell, *Defamiliarization and Poetic Interaction in Kentucky Route Zero*, 2014). His analysis gives value to defamiliarization as a source of poetic gameplay. But in KRZ, these techniques do not solely create poetic gameplay. Moreover, they make a considerable possibility of new realities for the audience.

1.3.4.1 Museum of dwellings. Museum of Dwellings is a particular scene in the game in a perspective sense. In this scene, our characters talk with residents of the houses presented in the museum as a showcase. Our characters aim to find a Dr. Truman to get treatment for Conway's injured leg. However, at the start of the scene, dialogues occur between Museum Staff and residents whom players never met until this moment. While the player proceeds with the dialogue between staff and residents, the player also controls movement of Conway in the museum.

For example, when Conway and Shannon visit a cabin with a little girl standing on its porch, the dialogue starts between Museum Staff and the little girl Flora. In the dialogue, the staff interrogates Flora about visitors' intentions, what they said and what they did during their visit. When dialogue proceeds to a point, they talk about Conway's entrance to the house; in the scene, Conway starts to walk inside the house. In one of the dialogue branches, the player discovers that Conway enters a house resembling his childhood house. In the branch, Flora mentions that Conway gets down into the basement, which she finds strange because the house doesn't have a basement. And she says Conway's claimed actions inside the house about finding a pit in the basement, reaching the bottom of the hole, and getting into the water. The conversation becomes very strange and illogical while the screen fades out to black. When the dialogue between Flora and the staff finishes, suddenly, the camera returns to the scene, and the player sees Conway getting out of the cabin. At the following residents, staff still queries another resident called Walker while Conway and Shannon walk in another showcase of a house. In the conversation, Walker mentions how the old man's (Conway) leg is in bad condition and how he offered a bottle of alcohol for his pain. Then he says Conway's strange look at the bottle, indicating his possible old alcohol addiction. At this moment, the player learns about Conway's addiction to alcohol from two irrelevant characters' dialogue.

In this scene, the player moves to the residents' perspective as observers of Shannon, Conway, and the dog. Suddenly the main characters become visitors who act strangely, and dialogues resemble witness statements. The player learns new information about Conway's background in this statement format. The character just played 5 minutes ago becomes a third-person character mentioned in a story. This change in perspective creates mixed feelings in the player about Conway and enables the player to create various realities and images about Conway. Moreover, the way dialogue branches trigger the actions of Conway in the scene simultaneously creates bizarre gameplay that may cause different perceptions in the player in narration.

1.3.4.2 The Radvansky center. In Act IV, the team travels through Echo River with a ferry. On their journey, Shannon decides to stop by a questioner office named The Radvansky Center to make some money for a test. The whole scene is played from the perspective of security cams. But the dialogue time occurs in the future when the security tapes are found by workers of the center in a box at storage. In the scene, the dialogues are made between Mimi and Jenn, who work at the center. While they have a dialogue about the footage, the player also controls Shannon, that appears in the footage. So, the player interacts with the future dialogues that control Shannon's movement in the current time from the perspective of security cams. During the dialogues, Mimi and Jenn interpret questionnaires that Shannon answers. The questionnaires are aimed at measuring memory degradation of the precipitant.

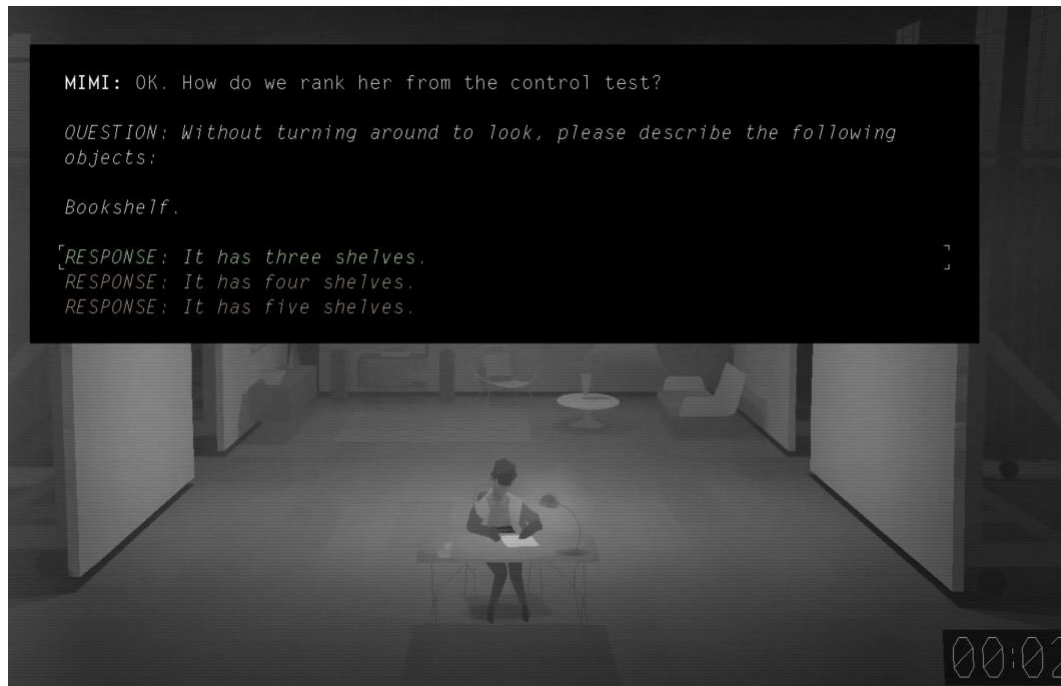


Figure 6: Mimi and Jenn watch security camera records of Shannon filling the questionnaires

This scene has a unique dialogue branching system for character development of Shannon. Dialogues between Mimi and Jenn proceed with simple clicks. Still, when an answer is required by Shannon, the player chooses the answer of Shannon, generally about personal questions like “What is your first thing to remember?” or questions that measure the memory of Shannon and the player. Memory measurement gets involved to the player since the whole scene was visible to the player too before the questionnaire started, and half covered with a dialogue box prompting those memory questions. The questions allow the player to reflect on their image of Shannon with more character-related answers to questions.

QUESTION: Without turning around to look, please describe the following objects:

Bookshelf.

Option 1 - RESPONSE: It is shaped like a snake

Option 2 - RESPONSE: It is shaped like a transformer coil

Option 2 - RESPONSE: It is nondescript

QUESTION: Poster.

RESPONSE: I don't remember what was depicted on the poster

Option 1 - RESPONSE: I have a poster in my workshop, a vintage advertisement for vacuum tubes

Option 2 - RESPONSE: I have a poster in my workshop, a chart of resistor values.

Option 3- RESPONSE: I don't keep posters on my walls

Shannon is an electrician who deals with repairing devices like TV, radios etc. Transformer coil, vacuum tubes, or resistor values are character-specific answers. It is up to the player whether this character's coherent answer is selected.

In this scene, playing through different characters and timelines while forming the psychological profile of Shannon; enables the player to get into another dimension of interaction. Creating a custom profile for a character is not an occasional mechanic in games. However, in the context of KRZ, with disruption of play perspective, this mechanic creates an area that inspires the player to their reality about Shannon.

One of the camera records in this scene also has a meaningful dialogue between Mimi and Jean which may inspire the player about their choices.

JENN: I've been saying we should just use photographs. Watercolor paintings already have the quality of a half-remembered dream, anyway. Like they're inviting you to forget them, or somebody else already forgot them for you; like a mama-bird feeding her chicks cotton candy.

Photographs are it's not that they're really more accurate or true, but we think they are. They put you in that mindset. They have authority

So, yeah: out with the watercolors, I say

In this dialogue, the player exposed how our mind is forced to think our visions. Even visions are not supposedly more accurate or have authority over our realities. The speech invites players to break this authority and create their realities without the bounds of their visions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Surrealism is an elderly movement in art history. It was born from poetry and transformed into every narrative medium in a different form. Since video game is one of the latest narrative instruments that emerged from technological development, its potential embracement of historical art movements has just started to be observed recently. Each experiment create a new path in the medium of video games. The powerful immersive capability of video games that grow with technological development opens new possibilities for its audience. Surrealism is one of the areas that can take an entirely new form in video games. Nowadays, the meaning of reality is being questioned not only by the art world but also by whole sociological and psychological perspectives. Technological terms and so-called buzzwords like metaverse, mixed reality, and digital literacy may be prophecies for our new life in the next unpredictable century. Games are one of the most primitive activities of living things, and the merge of this cognitive activity and technology may have enormous potential to change our perception of reality. The surrealism that is brought by the prominent art world may not be bound by art but in our daily lives in the future.

This analysis of Kentucky Route Zero does not reflect comprehensive potential techniques of Surrealist activity in games. Video games, game mechanics, and game interactions have the potential to provide endless possibilities for new realities. Still, the analysis uses a solid structure by referring to art literature to decompose KRZ and shows how it forces players to create their surreal experience.

Game development is a multidisciplinary field consisting of technical, visual, auditorial, literary, and psychological areas. Close reading and building block techniques of Fernández-Vara (2015), help to point out the game's presented surrealist activity within these different areas of the game development. KRZ especially comes to the forefront in a surrealistic sense with its experimental mechanics, illogical story, minimalist but dreamy visual art, innovative publishing method, niche community, and multidisciplinary production team.

The analysis also separates the game according to its types of surrealist elements. These elements are parts of the game that has the potential to disturb player's perception and forces them to create their own reality experience. Known techniques adopted from the art movement like poetic narration, doubling, magical realism, and mimicry methods are the main subtopics of these surrealist elements presented in this analysis. These subtopics provide a methodological guideline with the deconstruction of KRZ; to create a game that offers a surrealist experience to its player.

Surrealism has gotten new forms since its birth. In a modern world where the term of surreal also loses its meaning, it is crucial to understand its place in newly emerged areas. This article is one of the small milestones for that purpose. Future research is required to create a methodological framework for games that proposes surrealist experiences. While these studies may be in the form of analysis of games like this research; also, more practical and questioner-based studies are needed in the game design field to understand surrealism's full potential.

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