Video Game Designers' Views on Storytelling in Video Games
A Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Video Game Designers

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ABSTRACT

Video games as a medium were born about seventy years ago, when computer scientists at Cambridge University created a digital version of noughts and crosses in 1949. Only much more recently have designers begun using video games as a medium for storytelling, with *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Will Crowther and Don Woods, 1975) pioneering the genre. Most academics studying video games argue that telling a story in a video game presents difficulties, because narratives require structure and structure goes against the core qualities of the medium, namely interactivity and choice, which require a degree of freedom. Despite the concerns of the academics, video game companies have continued to tell stories using video games. Some games, like *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) have even gained a lot of praise for their story. Thus, it could be that game designers have a different view on narrative in games than academics, but previous to this study, there was hardly any research on how video game designers view the interplay between story and video games. The question this thesis aims to answer is: how do video game designers articulate the writing and designing of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives? To answer the research question, twelve video game designers were interviewed, most of which employed at AAA video game companies. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed with the use of thematic analysis. From the analysis resulted that video game designers do recognise the concerns that the academics have with regards to the difficulty in telling a structured narrative while simultaneously playing into the unique qualities of video games like interactivity and choice. They were familiar with and mindful of *ludonarrative dissonance* and other complications of video game storytelling. However, game designers' first priority is to make video games that provide a good player experience. This means that some narrative and gameplay rules are sometimes broken in favour of the enjoyment of the player. This can be seen as the designers taking some artistic license in the game design process. The player is willing to accept certain illogical game elements if they benefit the quality of player experience on the whole. AAA game designers generally want to make use of video game design norms, because they do not want to frustrate the player when she is learning to play the game. AAA game designers cannot experiment much with the medium of video games, because their company cannot afford to take risks. Instead, AAA game designers pose that it will be the indie game industry that will produce breakthroughs in gameplay and narrative design. Finally, game designers state that narrative in video games has improved greatly over the last decades. Looking towards the future, they think that narrative in video games can only improve further with the advancements of technology, most promisingly augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), personalised artificial intelligence (AI) and emergent systems. In future research, academics might want to shift the focus from game design problems to the artistic license of video game designers. More research could be done into the practices of indie video game designers and future storytelling formats like AR, VR, AI and emergent systems.

KEYWORDS: *video games, narrative, video game design, agency, interactivity, storytelling*

Preface

As my master's degree is nearing completion, I take this opportunity to look back at my final year at university. As the year coincided entirely with the COVID-19 pandemic, I can count the times I have visited the university campus on one hand. While this was certainly not how I had imagined it, I can say that my fellow students, the teachers and I have really put in the effort to make the most out of it. The same goes for my supervisor Prof. Dr. Jeroen Jansz, whose enthusiasm from the very beginning of the project has encouraged me tremendously to pursue the topic that I am interested in. I greatly appreciated that, before discussing the feedback on my draft chapters, there was always some time for small talk; holidays, the pandemic, online teaching, fun anecdotes and other projects. These conversations made the thesis process a lot more enjoyable. Though my favourite part of this project was being able to talk to the twelve video game designers who virtually invited me into their homes. Each of them was incredibly kind and generous with the answers that they gave to my questions. This is why I would like to take a moment to thank Lars Korendijk, Merlin Woudstra, Koen Deetman, Raynor Arkenbout, John Gonzalez, Ken Levine, Blake Rebouche, Josh Sawyer, Jason Barnes, Austin Grossman, Drew Holmes and Sam Gill for contributing to this thesis. Finally, I want to thank Jan and Vera and my parents for giving me the time, the space and the snacks I needed to dedicate myself fully to getting the words on paper, and Koen for all the laughter between study hours. Six months and combined total of 100.000+ words in transcripts, research documents and drafts later, I can proudly say that my passion for video games has only grown stronger. I hope that that passion is reflected in this thesis.

Anna Konijnendijk

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List of video game terms

This table contains a list of video game terms that are used in this thesis. These terms will also be explained in the text, but for reference, they are listed below as well.

Term	Definition
Narrative	Narrative is used here as a synonym to story. It is a sequence of events, usually it sets up a problem, want or need at the beginning which is resolved at the end.
Gameplay	The gameplay of a game is comprised of all the actions that the player can do in the game, for example; running, jumping, shooting, collecting, healing, buying, selling, lying, etc.
Mechanics	Mechanics (plural) is often used as a synonym to gameplay. Mechanic (singular) refers to one of the actions that the game allows for. For example, jumping is a mechanic.
Cutscene	A cutscene (or a cinematic) is a short film-like sequence that the player has no control over. It is often used to further the narrative.
UI	UI stands for User Interface. It refers to the things that the player sees on the screen that are not part of the gameworld.
Game design	This term is an umbrella term for all things that are related to what the video game is going to be, including visuals, audio, gameplay, UI and narrative.
Player character	The character that the player has control over during the game.
Avatar	A player character which is a virtual (idealised) representation of the player. While player characters usually have a personality of their own, avatars' wants and desires are usually controlled by the player.
NPC	NPC stands for Non-Playable Character. It is a commonly used term to refer to characters in a video game that the player cannot directly control.
Enemy	In games that are centred around combat, enemies are a type of NPC's that serves as the player character's opponent in the game. They have to be defeated (usually killed) for the game to progress.
Respawn	When the player character dies or fails to meet the game's criteria for success, the player character is often brought back to an earlier moment in the game. Failure is rarely permanent, so the player gets to try to overcome the challenge again.
Quest	A task in a game, usually involving the retrieving of an object
Sidequest	A task in a game that does not have to be completed in order to reach the end of the game
Side content	Parts of the game that do not have to be engaged with to finish the game.
Health bar	A bar that indicates to the player how close her player character or the enemy is to being defeated. It is a part of the UI.

Gameworld	The gameworld (or gamespace) is the virtual space in the game that the player character moves around in.
Immersion	Immersion is a term used to describe how involved and engaged people are in a story. Things that can add to immersion are haptic feedback, headphones, VR glasses, anything that removes the "distance" between the virtual experience and the audience.
Interactivity	Video games are interactive because the actions of the player influence the state of the video game. It can be argued that every medium is interactive (films can be paused, books can be read in the wrong order) but most scholars agree that video games are uniquely equipped to handle player input.
AAA games industry	The AAA (or Triple-A) industry is the sector of the video games industry with the most resources; a lot of time, many employees, the best technology and a lot of money. This sector is contrasted with the indie games industry.
Indie games industy	"indie" is short for independent, which is to say, independent from large corporations. Indie games are usually shorter and smaller.
NDA	A Non-Disclosure Agreement is a legal contract that states that the person that signed the contract cannot disclose information about the project they are working on to outsiders.
(Gaming) console	A computer that is fabricated specifically for gaming. For example, the Nintendo Wii, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, etc.
Controller	Comparable to a remote control for a television, a player presses buttons on the controller to send signals to the game console. With the controller, the player controls the actions of the player character.
Engine	The software programme that the game is built in.

Table 1: A list of video game terms and their definitions

1. Introduction

The Lumière brothers were among the first cinematographers to tell a story with the newly invented film camera. Among their first stories was *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* (1895), a 46-second film of a boy who plays a practical joke on the gardener by stepping on the water hose. The simple story was shot from a stationary position, akin to watching a theatre performance. From 1904 forward, commercial filmmaking became more and more centred around storytelling (Thompson and Bordwell, 2009, p. 31). Films began making cuts in film footage, using multiple angles, taking the camera to different locations and filming close-ups to focus the attention of the audience. This is the language of film that film audiences are now familiar with. If one character talks while facing to the left, and the other responds while facing right, the audience understands that they are facing each other. If the camera lingers on something, the audience understands that it is important. *Establishing shots* announce to the audience where the next scene is going to take place. When a lot of different short clips follow each other in quick succession (a montage) the audience understands that it is a condensed way to show the passage of time (Thompson and Bordwell, 2009, p. 35). These are the storytelling techniques that originate from the medium of film, but as *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* shows, these techniques did not emerge at the same time as the medium. It took many years and a lot of experimentation to develop a language. This same kind of development in storytelling is currently happening in video games.

      More than seventy years after the commercialisation of film, audiences in the United States, Europe and Japan were introduced to video games with *Pong* (Atari, 1972). Video games had already existed for longer, but *Pong* was one of the first games that introduced video games to the general public. The first storytelling games were designed for the personal computer, like *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Will Crowther and Don Woods, 1975). This game only consisted of white text against a dark background, due to the graphical and technological limitations of computers at the time. Since then, the visual and textual elements of video games have merged together. It is now not unusual for games to tell stories using visuals, text, and audio. This is not to say that all video games have stories; there are countless examples of highly successful games that do not tell stories. *Tetris* (Pajitnov, 1984) and *Rocket League* (Psyonix, 2015) are two highly addictive and entertaining games that do not tell a story. However, in most cases, the advancements in technology are used to tell more and more complicated narratives. Some games have gotten a lot of praise from players for their story, including *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013), *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Cafe, 2011) and *Undertale* (Toby Fox, 2015).

      Video game scholars argue that storytelling video games is far from trivial (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 219). The fact that video games are interactive and need to be played in order for the story to unfold complicates the way the audience is made to relate to the narrative. In the same way that a film cannot be fully understood by merely reading the script as if it were a novel, a video game cannot be understood without taking *gameplay* (the acts that a player can do within the video game, like running, jumping, collecting) into account. To be able to understand video game stories as a collaboration between narrative and gameplay, game scholars are interested in creating a vocabulary to be able to discuss the unique characteristics of games. With that vocabulary, they are able to describe how narrative functions in interactive systems like video games. While some video game theorists also have some experience with designing video games themselves (Ian Bogost, Clint Hocking, Mary Flanagan), not much literature is written on the game designer's perspective on creating narrative in video games. Jeffery Klaehn is the only active video

game scholar who conducts interviews with video game designers (Klaehn, 2020; Klaehn, 2016). Not asking video game designers directly how they construct games and how they view narrative in games is a missed opportunity for video game scholars to get an insider's perspective in their field of study. Video game designers might have a different perspective on narrative and the interpretation of games, because of their position as creators as opposed to audience. In other words, they might have practises of designing narrative in games that scholars have not described yet in their literature. This is why this thesis has set out to explore how video game designers view narrative in video games.

My research question is: how do video game designers articulate the crafting (writing and designing) of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives?
Subquestions of this topic are:
- What does the process of creating (writing and designing) a video game look like?
- How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
- How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a game's narrative?

The term "video game designer" will be used as an umbrella term for the people who work in the video game industry whose role has to do with creating the narrative and the gameplay of the game. This includes video game writers, video game designers, gameplay designers and video game narrative designers. This does not include the people in the video game industry who work in marketing, human resources, programming and coding, sound design etc., although in small studios there may be overlap between these departments.

"Video game narratives" or "video game stories" are the narratives that are told in video games. These terms are used interchangeably. This category entails the story that the video game tells and the way in which it is told. To keep the research aims of the paper feasible, this research limits its scope to the crafting of single-player story-driven games. In story-driven games, the game tells a story that spans the beginning to the end of the game. Designers want to give the players a certain experience with their story, and they have to think about how to bring about that experience in the player using the affordances and constraints of the medium. This thesis does not focus on (online) multiplayer games, because those often do not focus on narrative. Their main appeal is that they allow friends to play together.

A better understanding of video games from the viewpoint of the designer can help academics get a better understanding of the video game narratives. It will help video game scholars to solidify their theories or build on them to create a better method of analysis for video games. With the continuously developing language of video game narrative, it could be that there are ways of embedding meaning into games that scholars have not uncovered yet.

It can also help to heighten the media literacy of the wider public with regards to games. With over 2.7 billion players worldwide generating a revenue of over 147 billion euro annually, video games are the biggest entertainment industry, despite its relative novelty (Newzoo, 2020). Gaining a mutual understanding between game designers and players will bring meaning-creation and interpretation closer together. It will move the medium of video games forward towards a better established, common language between creator and consumer. The answers to the research question and subquestions can provide direct and accessible tools to understand the narrative workings of video games.

To answer these questions, twelve video game designers were interviewed. Chapter 2 provides the academic background to the theories on game design that informed the topic list for the interviews. Chapter 3 of this thesis describes the research design method of this thesis. It

details the how the participants were selected, how the interviews were conducted and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method for thematic analysis (TA) that was used to analyse the transcripts from the interviews, using the programme NVivo. Chapter 4 reports on the results from the TA, discussing the themes that emerged from the interviews and how they were used to answer the three subquestions. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5, answers the main research question of this thesis, its implications for the field of video game studies and how it might impact video gamers and video game designers. Chapter 5 also discusses the limitations of the research method and suggests how to move forward and what research may be interesting in the future.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses the academic literature that has been written about video games and video game narrative. These theories provide a framework for discussing video game narratives with the video game designers. The first section in this chapter gives an overview of the history of video games, how the medium evolved and the position in culture that video games had in different regions around the world. This overview makes it possible to put the academic literature that was developed into the context of what video games looked like at the time. The second section in this chapter discusses the early history of video game studies and the difficulties that video game scholars faces in trying to get recognition for their field. Sections three to seven discuss frameworks that describe different kinds of narrative. The final section of this chapter focuses on the academic literature about player reception of video games.

2.1 Video game technology and culture

A discussion of the theories on narrative in games would be incomplete without putting them into the context of what video games looked like at the time when the theory was written. The lineage of video games cannot be traced back to one single moment. It is an amalgamation of different advancements in technology from different regions in the world and many cultural and societal shifts. The cultural practise of play and games is much older, as Johan Huizinga writes in his influential work *Homo Ludens* (1938), but this section limits itself to video games and digital practises of gaming only. This section outlines the notable advancements, the people who made games, the kinds of games that were made and the audience that they were made for. For clarity, this section only uses the term *video game*, even though the medium was also known as computer game, digital game, television game, electronic game, video reaction game, and other names (Smith, 2015). These days, the term video game is most common, which is why this thesis will use it.

  Among the first video games was a version of noughts and crosses, developed by researchers at the University of Cambridge in 1949 (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 67). The game was not made for the entertainment value of playing it, but rather to test the capabilities of the computer. This was less than ten years after Thomas J. Watson, the president of IBM at the time, had allegedly predicted that there was only a need for five computers across the whole world (Carr, 2008, para. 1). The concept of a personal computer, or the computer as an entertainment product, was so far from the public imagination that it was impossible to imagine video games as a commercial product. This is why the MIT students who created the video game *Spacewar!* in 1962 allowed their game to be freely distributed among anyone who had a computer that could run the game (Kent, 2010, p. 54). *Spacewar!* was a big success within the small programming community. The video game introduced some of the conventions that would later make it possible to commercialise video games. Most importantly, the game was not bound to one computer, which meant that the programme for the game could run on multiple kinds of computers. The after-burn effect on the display screens gave a science-fiction like effect to the movements of the rocket ships and bullets in the game, which made it perfect for a space-themed game.

  Following the creation of *Spacewar!*, American electrical engineer Nolan Bushnell wanted to introduce video games to a wider audience by turning them into arcade games. He copied the business model from the game stands at summer fairs that he used to work at: people would have to go up to the arcade machine and pay a quarter to play for a short amount of time (Kent, 2010, p. 68). Bushnell worked on this concept for over five years and after some iterations, video game arcade machines became a commercial success in the United States in the 1970's. The first video games that were made for arcade machines were not targeted at children, but at adults at bars —

the place where most of the machines would go, before the existence of arcade halls. The successful video game *Pong* (Atari, 1972) was exported to Japan, where it was so successful that existing toy and electronics manufacturers started making their own arcade video games, among which Sega and Nintendo (Picard, 2013, para. 13). Arcade video games also became popular in Europe, but the European market did not produce their own arcade machines at a large scale.

People who worked on the games at the time stated that they did not make their games with a certain audience in mind, but that they tried to make games that were fun to play by using the full capacity of the technology at the time (Lien, 2013, para. 3). However, it is important to note that most of the people working on creating video games were male, possibly causing the games that were produced to unintentionally cater more towards a male audience. In the following years, many arcade games, both in the United States and Japan, introduced new concepts, including the first-person perspective (*Night Driver*, 1976), the platform game (*Space Panic*, 1980), and the isometric perspective, also known as 2.5D, because of its illusion of three-dimensionality (*Zaxxon*, 1982). Arcade games also introduced iconic video game characters like Pac-Man (Pac-Man, 1980) and Mario (*Donkey Kong*, 1981).

At the same time as Nolan Bushnell, American television engineer Ralph H. Baer was also inspired by *Spacewar!* and came up with a different way in which he could commercialise video games. He realised that many American families already had televisions at home, and that they could be used as monitors for home consoles. In 1972, Baer released the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home console (Kent, 2010, p. 60). Bushnell's company Atari followed by releasing a version of *Home Pong* in 1975, and other companies followed with their own versions of home consoles. They were marketed as entertainment for the whole family, often simply mimicking arcade games. Like the arcade games, most home console games were action games, revolving around one *mechanic* (an action that the game allows for) like running, shooting, jumping or driving.

A small amount of Magnavox Odyssey consoles was exported to Europe. European companies tried to compete with Magnavox by creating their own home consoles, at a more affordable price, or with improved versions of the games. European companies also popularised the use of video game chips that made it easier for video games to spread, because the video games could be sold independently from the video game console, but other than that, video games did not have a big impact on the European toys market at the time (Winter, 2008, p. 51).

The popularity of both arcade games and home consoles in the United States suddenly fell in 1983, the year of the video game crash. Atari released several poorly made games for their home consoles and then sued other video game companies in an attempt to not lose their position as lead manufacturer. This led to many more poorly made games to flood the market by small inexperienced video game developers (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 74, 88). Sales went down and many companies went bankrupt. Another large contributing factor in the crash of home consoles and arcade games was the rise of the home computers at the start of the 1980's. Home computers generally had better graphics, colours and sound than the game consoles. They also introduced the ability to store and save progress, which allowed for longer, more complicated storylines, because the game did not need to be played through in one sitting. Video games for the computer developed in large part independently from arcade video games and home console video games. Fuelled by the popularity of J.R.R. Tolkien and the tabletop roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons*, text-based adventure games were popular on the home computer. Will Crowther pioneered the genre with *Colossal Cave Adventure* in 1975, but in the 1980's the genre started incorporating visuals, and eventually the point-and-click format (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 74, 88). Digital versions of tabletop strategy games were also played on the home computer.

Video game consoles slowly came back into popularity in the United States in 1985, with the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) from Japan. To advertise the NES, Nintendo America avoided the term "video game" and instead marketed it as a "toy for boys" that doubled as a VHS player (Arsenault, 2017, p. 144; Lien, 2013, para. 5). Sega, Nintendo's biggest competitor as a console producer, marketed itself to teenage boys, positioning itself as cooler and more daring than Nintendo, with the promise of more guns, cars and violence (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 94). This sparked the beginning of the "console wars" between Sega and Nintendo, in which Sega and Nintendo fiercely competed for the dominant position in the video game console market (Therrien and Picard, 2016, p. 2326).

Three-dimensional (3D) visuals became common in the 1990's, the decade that also marked the proliferation of the World Wide Web. The connection between computers made it possible to play multiplayer games and made it easier to share games. Players with good computer knowledge were able to create and share their own games (Camper, 2008, p. 197).

The atmospheric adventure game *Myst* (Cyan Worlds, 1993) became a massive success for its puzzle solving and storytelling (Liebman, 1994). With the arrival of the CD-ROM and the increased storage that it carried, designers created *interactive movies*, a type of adventure game that tried to blur the lines between video game and film. The game *Phantasmagoria* (Sierra On-Line, 1995) used recorded videos of actors walking, talking, opening doors, etc. to respond to the input of the player. The genre was short-lived, as production costs were high and the game felt slow and clunky to play. However, the fact that video games were trying to emulate film exemplifies that the video game designers were still unsure of what the medium was and what it could do, so they experimented with other familiar formats to develop and discover the strengths and weaknesses of the medium of video games. Writers also began to experiment with the hyperlink function of the World Wide Web to tell non-linear stories. This was called *hypertext fiction* and it occupied a space between video games and traditional fiction novels. Like with *interactive movies*, the initial excitement around the format soon waned. Hypertext fiction never succeeded in truly revolutionising the novel and the navigation of the different webpages made it difficult to present a cogent narrative (Johnson, 2013).

In the years that followed, games steadily improved graphically with each console iteration. The "war" between Nintendo and Sega was overtaken by the war between the Xbox from the American company Microsoft, and the PlayStation from Japan-based company Sony. These companies catered towards the hard-core gamers: gamers that thought of gaming as a part of their identity. Nintendo kept making consoles, but instead of trying to compete with Microsoft and Sony, Nintendo focused on a different market and advertised its consoles as family toys. Platforms like Valve's Steam allowed independent video game designers and small video game studios to easily share their video games. These games are called *indie games*, which are contrasted with AAA (or Triple-A) games from big studios. Most indie games are not as visually polished (refined, with a lot of attention to detail) as AAA games because indie studios work with smaller budgets. Indie games cater to more niche audiences.

Casual games — games that generally do not require a lot of time or skill to play — existed on the consoles and computers, but this share of the market did not get much attention from large game design companies. This suddenly changed with the release of (former Atari employee) Steve Jobs' iPhone in 2007. The AppStore, which was built into the iPhone, made downloading and playing games easier than ever before, causing a surge in casual games and casual gamers. This surge intensified the sentiment in self-identified hardcore gamer communities that casual gamers are not real gamers (Shaw and Chess, 2015, p. 284). The title of "gamer" was, in their eyes, reserved

for the proverbial standard male, usually heterosexual and white (Leaver and Wilson, 2015, p. 1). This was the demographic that console manufacturers had started advertising to in the 1980's. This feeling culminated in the 2014 #GamerGate controversy, in which four female game designers and journalists, and anyone who associated with them, were met with severe online and real life harassment for advocating for the inclusion of more diverse characters and stories in games (Shaw and Chess, 2015, p. 279).

Casual games also introduced microtransactions, where in-game items can be purchased in exchange for a small amount of real-life money. This phenomenon carried over to other platforms (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 110). In 2012, the company Oculus VR released the Oculus Rift: virtual reality (VR) goggles with screens in front of the eyes. Engineers had been trying to create virtual reality suits since 1980's, but with the Oculus Rift, VR was finally made available to the wider public. Many people, including Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, the company that bought Oculus VR, believed that VR would proliferate every aspect of life, including gaming. In reality, the VR experience did not live up to the people's expectations, and not many consumers bought the headsets (Roose, 2020). Around that same time, the video game studio Naughty Dog released *The Last of Us* (2013), a game that would go on to win countless awards for its story and became the cultural benchmark for what emotional depths could be achieved in video game narratives. Some big studios focus on single-player narratives, while others focus on creating fun arenas for multiplayer gaming. The *battle royale* genre, in which up to 100 online players battle against each other in a wide arena, is currently popular due to the success of *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017).

In short, in its seventy years of existence, of which only forty years commercially, the technological landscape changed drastically. Whereas Thomas J. Watson predicted the need for only five computers globally, it is now not unusual to have more than five computers per household (including smartphones, tablets, various gaming consoles, smart watches, etc.). Video games started out as single, dispersed instances and grew into a multi-billion-dollar industry. The biggest video game publishers focus predominantly on "green-brown games": games that centre sports and combat, often with a green and brown colour palette, targeted at a male audience. (Jansz and Vosmeer, 2009 p. 238). However, there is an endless amount of genres to cater to every type of player. The medium is continuously developing and experimenting with new trends, enabled by technological advancements and cultural practises of gaming.

2.2 Early history of video game studies

There are two types different academic approaches to video games: *situationalism* and *formalism.* Scholars who study games from a situationalist perspective look at the culture around games and the influence that video games have on players and over society. Scholars who study games from a formalist perspective study video games as objects. This practice is also known simply as *game analysis* and is similar to how film students analyse films (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 12-13). This thesis focusses on the theories of narrative in video games, so sections 2.2 to 2.6 will focus on the formalist perspective. Section 2.7 discusses some aspects of the social practises of gaming from the situationalist perspective.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Scandinavian scholars started taking an interest in the medium of video games. This interest coincided with a period of technological boosts that allowed the medium of video games to experiment with its form. Some academics speculated that interactive fiction might completely overtake the position of conventional novels (Yellowlees, 2001). Scholars like Janet Murray and Espen Aarseth, were interested in the interactive format and the narrative capabilities of interactive media, including video games. Espen Aarseth launched the

International Journal of Game Studies in 2001. In the first edition, he proclaimed that 2001 marked the beginning of video game studies. The attempt from video games to try to emulate the form of film and other media led Scandinavian game scholars to the question: how different are video games from other forms of media? If they are very similar, video game narratives could be analysed through existing frames of media analysis. If they are very different, they require a separate vocabulary.

This question sparked a debate that caused the Scandinavian formalists to split up in two groups: the *ludologists* and the *narratologists*. The narratologists were interested in the study of narrative in games. They looked at the methods of analysis that already existed in film and literature and applied them to video games. On the other side of the spectrum, the ludologists were interested in the study of play. This is why their name is a derivation of the word *ludus*, meaning play in latin. They built their theories upon earlier game theorists like Johan Huizinga and Roger Callois who wrote about analogue games and play. Ludologists were of the opinion that the medium of video games was significantly different from other forms of media and that it therefore required its own language and method of analysis (Juul, 2005, pp. 7-8, 16)

In retrospect, most ludologists and narratologists agree that both approaches can lead to interesting findings. The heatedness of the debate, especially from the side of the ludologists, can be explained by the fact that, in the early 2000's, ludologists felt that they were fighting for the field of game studies to exist. Ludologists heavily resisted the narratologist approach, because they saw it as a form of "colonisation" (Aarseth, 2001, para. 6). Espen Aarseth and other ludologists argued that the other fields of media studies did not want to accept game studies as a new valid field of research, because it would take away funds from the other fields.

2.3 Ludology

Markku Eskelinen belonged to the group of the "hard ludologists", who were of the opinion that video games were unlike other media. Instead, he argued that video games should be studied the same way that analogue games like chess are studied. By emphasising the connection between digital media and video games, the connection between video games and analogue games is obfuscated, which makes it easier for the colonisers to lay claims and ascribe qualities to video games which would logically not be ascribed to analogue games (Eskelinen, 2001a, para. 1). As Eskelinen illustrated it: "[i]f I throw a ball at you I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories" (Eskelinen, 2001b, p. 176). To Eskelinen, the fact that games could share characteristics with narratives, such as plots and characters, did not mean that they are the same thing. Forcing stories onto games undermined the further study of the features of the game (Eskelinen, 2001a, para. 6).

He argues that gaming is rather like configurative practice than a narrative experience, which is to say that the dominant user function of the game is to enable the player to undertake action within the game (Eskelinen, 2001a, para. 2). The player has to interpret the game in order to be able to understand how the game can be configured. This is different from media such as film and literature, in which reaching the end of the story is not meant to be a challenge. The piece of media can thus prioritise the interpretive practice. Video games reverse the act of configuring and interpreting to prioritise the configurative practice. Therefore, games cannot be analysed through literary theories, because there, the interpretation is the end goal, whereas in games it is only a means to get to the end of the game (Eskelinen, 2001a, para. 2). This is why hard ludologists reject a narrative approach to video game studies. Instead, Eskelinen proposes that video games are studied for how it plays with time, and how order, frequency, speed, duration and simultaneity can

influence the relation between how time is represented in the game and how the player experiences it. (Eskelinen, 2001b, p. 180-181).

More moderate ludologists, like Jesper Juul, acknowledge that it is possible for games to allude to stories in games, but they are skeptical of how effective games are at telling good stories. Like Eskelinen, Juul recognises that some video games have elements in common with stories, like characters, protagonists, hurdles and events, but agrees with Eskelinen that just because they have similarities, that does not mean that they are the same (Eskelinen, 2001b, p. 176). Games also can be linked to stories, or can have implied stories attached to them though the presentation of the game (the title of the game, the names of the characters, the text on the back of the package and other factors). This is what Juul calls the *back story*. However, a back story does not mean that the game itself is telling a story. For example, the story of *Space Invaders* would change if the game had been called *Aliens Trying to Get Back Home*, even when the gameplay remains unchanged. Finally, even games that do not make an overt attempt at telling or suggesting a story, it is still possible that players, after playing the game, make sense of their playing experience by constructing it as a story. Because of these arguments, Juul concludes that video games cannot be studied entirely separated from narrative. However, he remains that storytelling in video games is different than regular storytelling. Regular storytelling depends on a kind of knowledge that the events of the story have already happened, meanwhile in video games, the interaction happens in the present and are thus not yet decided upon. This causes a friction between narrative and interaction, or as Juul put it: "you cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time" (Juul, 2001, para. 33). This theory is central to many debates around narrative in video games.

Gonzalo Frasca and Rune Klevjer brought forth a more nuanced stance on the debate between narratology and ludology. Frasca argued that despite their focus on the gameplay aspect of video games, "ludologists love stories too" (Frasca, 2003, para. 1). In his view, goal of ludology was never to completely reject narratology, and more so to supplement it. Klevjer looked at cutscenes (premade scenes in video games that temporarily take away control from the player, usually in order to further the narrative), which had become common in video games, and remarked that, besides serving a narrative purpose, they provided a valuable break from the game, and that the interchanging rhythm of gameplay and cutscenes offers comfort to players (Klevjer, 2002). This is to say that he recognised that interactivity and narrative are often separated in games, this is not necessarily a problem for the player.

Jesper Juul softened his stance on narrative in the years that followed stating that the context in which the game takes place, often shaped by a narrative, does play an important role in the game. Instead of the term *narrative*, Juul suggests the word *fiction*, because it does not suggest a sequence of events, but rather refers to the world and the context in which the game takes place (Juul, 2005, p. 1). Juul retracting his previous opinion that video game narratives are negligible represents a shift in the debate between the ludologists and the narratologists.

2.4 Narratology

Because narratologists were not as eager to prove the merit of their approach to video games, they put less importance to the title of "narratologist" and rarely took a stance against ludology (Frasca, 2003, p.94). However, when it comes to prioritising the role of narrative in video games, ludologists refer to Janet Murray, Marie-Laure Ryan, Celia Pearce and Julian Kücklich.

In hindsight, the positions of narratologists do not seem that different from ludologists (Arsenault, 2014, p. 477). Marie-Laure Ryan agrees that not every story can be told effectively in video games, and that not all games tell stories, but she does argue that some genres of stories do

lend themselves for video game narratives, especially those in which the focus of the story is on the exploration of the story world (Ryan, 2001a, para. 11). Narrative in video games can provide the player with an enticing scenario that gets the player interested before the gameplay in itself becomes a goal for the players (Ryan, 2001a, para. 31). Ryan has also constructed a categorisation of different kinds of non-linear storytelling structures, ranging from structures in which any plot point can be triggered at any moment, to branching tree structures in which every decision that the player makes still ultimately moves in one direction, towards one of the game's endings (Ryan, 2001b).

In 1997, Janet Murray wrote *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, a book about interactive fiction. The holodeck is a fictional entertainment system from the television series *Star Trek*, in which three-dimensional, tangible holograms can interact with the audience. For Murray, the Holodeck represents both the potential of interactive narrative and the possible implications of a simulation that becomes almost indistinguishable from reality (Murray, 1997, pp. 27-28). For the medium to live up to its potential, the audience and the creators will have to get used to the way in which the medium navigates between participation and immersion, agency and story (Murray, 1997, p. 347).

Julian Kücklich argues that video games as a sequence of events will always be interpreted as narratives and that it would therefore be counterproductive to resist all narrative theories (Kücklich, 2003).

2.5 Different types of narrative

Henry Jenkins (2003) did not take a stand within the debate between narratologists and ludologists. He classified the ways in which video games tell stories into four categories: emergent narratives, evoked narratives, embedded narratives and enacted narratives.

The lowest level of narrative influence is the emergent narrative. This type of narrative depends entirely on the player. As Kücklich put it, players make sense of their play experience by constructing the events into a story. Even Tetris can be a gripping tale of the player battling against the computer in increasingly intense levels. However, it is not the video game that tells the tale, but it is the player who constructs a story through their actions. Video game designers can choose to create a game that lends itself to the player as a space to build stories in. Sandbox-type games like *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2000) *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) and *Spore* (Maxis Software, 2008) provide the player with a lot of agency and freedom that allows for the emergence of this type of narrative. This is not to say that these types of games are "blank pages". The game is carefully crafted in such a way that the actions that can be taken lend themselves for storytelling (Jenkins, 2003, p. 128). The game consists of an emergent system that sets limits and restrictions in such a way that the game is enjoyable as a narrative playground.

Evoked narratives are similar to what Juul calls *back story*. This type of narrative evokes the narrative of other media (Jenkins, 2003, p. 128). For example, the game *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (Electronic Arts, 2017) evokes the story of the Star Wars movies by including iconic Star Wars characters like Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker and Yoda. Players can visit the iconic Death Star and other planets from the films. The game is not adding to the films as a form of transmedia storytelling, it is only evoking the feeling of the films by replicating its characters and setting.

Embedded narratives are stories that are embedded in the gameworld. These types of narratives work best in games that centre exploration. Detective stories, for example, are about uncovering what happened in a certain place by correctly interpreting the clues in the room. In video games, the player takes on the role of the detective. Video games like *Myst* (Cyan Worlds, 1993) take this approach to storytelling (Jenkins, 2003, p. 126).

The way of storytelling that is most similar to a traditional narrative from other media is the enacted narrative. Like the name suggests, the player takes on a role within the narrative as it is happening. This is the type of narrative that video game scholars consider the most problematic. If the player does not cooperate with the direction that the story is going in, the story falls flat, which is to say that the story no longer reaches the emotional depth it aspired to reach. When the video game constrains the player to make sure that the story unfolds the way the designers planned it, the choice and freedom of the player is taken away (Jenkins, 2003, p. 125). It is important to balance exposition and player freedom, but Jenkins also notes that other media can also follow a similar structure in which a framework is established that leads to a spectacle. In action movies, a scene can set up a scenario that requires the hero to show off all their kung-fu moves. Thus, this kind of narrative structure is not unique to video games and is not necessarily a bad thing.

Jenkins notes that video games can combine these types of narratives and that there are very few games that belong to only one category, but the classification does provide a useful tool to talk about the different kinds of narrative experiences that video game designers create.

2.6 Ludonarrative dissonance

Another useful concept when talking about games is the term *ludonarrative dissonance*, which was coined by video game designer Clint Hocking in a 2007 blog post. In the blog post, Hocking writes that the gameplay and the narrative in the game *BioShock* (Irrational Games, 2007) have two incompatible messages. According to Hocking, the point of the story is that power corrupts, even though the gameplay of *BioShock* uncritically promotes the amalgamation of power to finish the story. This points to an interesting aspect that the medium of games has that no other medium has: the way that the player interacts with the game can mean something. According to Hocking, the *mechanics* (the things that players can do in a game, like shooting, driving, stealing, crouching, healing, sparing, etc) in the video game can be congruent or dissonant with the story (Hocking, 2007). Although the blog post was brief in its exploration of the term, *ludonarrative dissonance* caught on in general video game discourse, and has since been used by players, video game reviewers and scholars. The proliferation of the term highlights the importance for video game scholars of looking at the terminology which is used to discuss video games in informal circles, too (Juul, 2005, p. 18). As will be evident from the results of the interviews, video game designers are aware of this term and take it into consideration when designing video games.

2.7 Studying video game influence on society

In 2007, Ian Bogost introduced the term *procedural rhetoric* (Bogost, 2007, p. 3). This term considers how the structure of video games can affect the player. Bogost argues that video games are in a unique position in relation to other media because they allow the player to try things, to test her assumptions and to reframe her assumptions based on the feedback from the video game. This, he argues, can make video games very persuasive of their ideology. Instead of telling players what the correct path forward is, the player arrives at that conclusions herself through trial and error. In 2007, Bogost foresaw a future where different fields make use of the procedural rhetoric to persuade audiences. More than ten years later, he admits that his predictions did not come true. Video games that had as goal to persuade the audience turned out to be rare. Even the games that tried to have a persuasive effect on the player were easily misconstrued to mean the opposite of what the video game designers intended (Bogost, 2021, p. 31). This does not mean that games have no impact on players at all; scholars agree that, like any cultural artefact, video games are capable of influencing the attitudes of players (De la Hera and Raessens, 2021, p. 58).

In the widely influential book of 2008, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* Mary Flanagan writes that practices of gameplay reflect the values of society across times. Critical play is the type of play that challenges the status quo. In the book, Flanagan explores ways in which players and gameplay designers push against "social, political, and cultural systems" (Flanagan, 2008, p.15). With regards to video games, Flanagan notes that the video game design industry in 2008 was predominantly white and male (pp. 225-226). Critical games reflect on these spaces of play. Critical game designers have purposefully created frictions between gameplay and narrative to make the player feel uncomfortable. Critical games have critiqued the violence of fighting games by requiring players to wear a chicken suit to play (p. 233). These games are "appropriate or alter established gaming models in an effort to send a message or affect change. These games are infused with socio-political criticism in their quest for digital activism" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 247). This is to say that critical games subvert the norms and expectations of games in a way that the player does not expect. The game challenges the player to reconsider these norms of play and the aspect of society is reflected in these norms of play.

2.8 Conclusion

To sum up the findings of this chapter, video games as a commercial product has existed for about fifty years. In those years, technology has progressed a lot and the cultural practise of playing video games has changed with it. In the 1970's, video games were placed predominantly in bars and later arcade halls where they required a quarter coin to be played. When video games moved into the home, they were marketed as toys for boys, and later toys for young men. At the same time, the personal computer grew into a play device, starting with text-based games and incorporating more and more graphics. Thanks to the iPhone, video games are now more ubiquitous than ever, which has caused a group of self-identified gamers to police who gets to classify themself as a gamer. To be able to qualify as a gamer, players would have to play green-brown games that are typically associated with male gamers. Over the last 50 years, games have diversified into a wide range of video game genres, each with its own visual, narrative and gameplay conventions.

Academics have started showing interest in the medium of video games in the second half of the 1990's, and the International Journal of Game Studies was first published in 2001, marking, according to its creator, the first year of video game studies. In the first few years of video game studies, especially in the Scandinavian academic sphere, there was a debate that centred around the ludologists and the narratologists. From the debate resulted a lot of theory about narrative in video games, what role it should have in a game and whether it is possible to combine narrative with gameplay. After 2005, the debate subsided in favour of a more integrated approach. Henry Jenkins categorised different ways in which narratives can be told in video games, deliberately not picking a side in the ludology-versus-narratology debate. Clint Hocking introduced the term ludonarrative dissonance, which has proved itself to be a useful tool to describe the phenomenon of disconnected story and gameplay in the medium of video games. Finally, from a situationalist perspective, Ian Bogost and Mary Flanagan explored the role that video games could play in society, as political and activist tool of persuasion and as a critique on societal norms and values.

The history and theory that were covered in this chapter have formed the foundation for this thesis. This chapter has informed the interview process that will be discussed in Chapter 3, in which the method is described. The ludology versus narratology debate has provided the basis for the questions about how video game designers viewed the medium as a tool for storytelling, Jenkins' categorisation of different types of video game narratives provided a framework in the conversations with the video game designers. Finally, Bogost's theory on persuasive games and

Flanagan's notion of critical play lead to the questions about how player expectations of narrative and gameplay can be subverted for a specific purpose. The fourth chapter, which covers the results from the interviews, shows that video game designers use the same terms, like ludonarrative dissonance, agency and emergent narrative, to talk about the issues that they face in the design process. In Chapter 5, the conclusion of this thesis, after the main research question is answered, the implications of the results of the research for the existing theory are discussed. Furthermore, in Chapter 5 a direction for future research is suggested.

3. Method

The goal of this research was to find out how video game designers articulate the writing and designing of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives. The research was divided into three subquestions.

- What does the process of writing and designing a video game look like?
- How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
- How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a video game's narrative?

These are broad, open-ended research questions. A qualitative method is best suited for this research question because it can explore the full breadth and depth of the topic (Babbie, 2008, p. 272). Because there has not been much previous research on this topic, this research required a qualitative method that can result in new theoretical insights. Firstly, this required in-depth interviews with video game designers in which they can speak unrestrictedly about their beliefs and practices. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (TA). By adhering to the method for TA by Braun and Clarke (2006), which lists six clear steps, this thesis ensures that the results from the TA are high in validity and reliability. This thesis tries to uncover how video game designers view narrative in games, so video game designers were asked directly. This way, the thesis accurately reflects what it is trying to measure, which contributes to the validity of the results reported in this thesis (Babbie, 2008, p.160). Their answers were used in the TA to formulate a conclusion to the research question. By clearly describing each step, the method will be performed the same way each time which will yield the same results, which makes it high in reliability (Babbie, 2008, p. 157).

This chapter details how the interviews were conducted and how the TA was applied to the transcripts. First, it describes the population and the participants of this research, and how and why they were selected. Then it goes over the interviews and how they were conducted. Finally, this chapter discusses how the transcripts from the interviews were analysed using TA. The results of the analysis will be discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 4. The results will be interpreted in the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5.

3.1 Population

The population of this research consists of all video game designers who have ever worked on the narrative or the story of a single-player story-driven video game. Depending on the size of the company and the type of games that the company makes, the job titles that these people have can vary. In big companies, writers can have a very specified job that entails only a certain aspect of the writing process. These titles include video game writer, lead narrative, head writer, narrative director, quest writer, creative director, head of narrative design, etc. In small companies, video game designers can have very broad roles, like programming, creating the artwork for the game, animating the characters, marketing the game and writing and designing the story of the game. In small companies, these people often do not have specific titles, but they are still included in the population. This thesis will refer to this population broadly as video game designers.

3.2 Participants

I compiled a list of video game designers who were credited as writers for narrative-driven games, AAA games as well as indie successes. This is a purposive sampling method, as the participants were manually selected as opposed to random selection (Babbie, 2008, p. 204). This way I could ensure that the video games that they worked on fit the criteria for a single-player narrative-driven game

and that they played a role in the crafting of the narrative for that game. These video game designers were contacted through LinkedIn, using the *connect* function and adding a short message with a request for an interview. LinkedIn was the best choice, because most video game designers were not contactable through other platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and did not have a public e-mail address. A benefit of using LinkedIn is that with the expansion of my LinkedIn network, more video game designers could be contacted. Seven video game designers agreed to an interview, but the majority did not respond. If a game designer had made their email address publicly available, they were contacted there. One participant responded. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked to provide a reference to another video game designer. This is the snowball sampling method (Babbie, 2008, p. 205). With this snowball sampling method, four participants were recruited. This amounts to a total of twelve participants.

3.4 The interviews

I interviewed twelve video game designers. During the interviews, the interviewees shared their experiences and insights that I interpreted in order to answer the research question. The best interviewing method for this research question is in-depth interviewing, because it "permits the researcher to explore fully all the factors that underpin participants' answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs" (Legard et al., 2003, p.141). This research aims to explore these factors in the interviewees' practices of meaning-making in video game narrative design. In in-depth interviews, the interviewer asks open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to give elaborate and nuanced answers (Babbie, 2008, p. 272). The interviewer plays an active part in the co-production of meaning, which is to say that the interviewer and the interviewee work together to capture the depth and the nuances of the discussion topics. This is why in-depth interviews are often semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a topic list, but the interviewer can choose to diverge from the topic list to ask follow-up questions or follow the interviewee's line of thought to other topics (Legard et al., 2003, p. 141). The topic list is a list of questions that are informed by the academic literature. Because in-depth interviews are collaborations between interviewer and interviewee, I, as the interviewer, played an active role in the meaning-making process of the interview. Therefore, I had to be reflexive of the way in which my involvement could affect the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). Reflexivity comes in two forms: being cognisant of one's own biases in the interviewing process and being aware of the way in which the interviewer can affect the interviewee in a multitude of ways (Roni Berger, 2015; Richard and Emslie, 2000). Firstly, as I am ultimately convinced of the narrative capabilities of video games, I made sure that my convictions did not influence my critical listening skills and that I did not assume to understand an implied answer if it was not explicitly stated. Secondly, I have been mindful of how the interviewees perceived me as a young female Masters student. I was mindful of how my level of education could influence interviewees perceptions of me, as not many of the interviewees had followed a similar education path. I wanted to present myself as knowledgeable about the field of gaming, the history of games, the practise of gaming and academic views of gaming without being patronising. Because the interviews were conducted online, I made sure to declutter my background and present professionally. Richard and Emslie have found in their research that interviewees' perceptions of the interviewer can influence the way they interact with the interviewer. Especially for researchers whose role and social status is sometimes not clearly defined, their status as female was often given more importance than their status as researcher (Richard and Emslie, 2000, pp. 74-75).

The interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The webcams were turned on, so that the interviewee and interviewer could see each other's facial expressions. The

interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes in total. I started the interviews with an introduction of myself and the goal of the research thesis. This is the first step in building good rapport, which is an essential requirement for a successful in-depth interview (Johnson, 2011, p. 8). Then, I took the time to go over the informed consent form. Since many of the interviewees were working on a project that they could not yet talk about, I made sure to stress that I have no intention to talk about non-disclosed projects. The interviews were recorded using the built-in record feature of Zoom and Microsoft Teams. After the start of the recording, the participant confirmed that they understood their rights as a participant and that they agreed to continue with the interview. The in-depth part of the interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes. The interviews were guided by the topic list (see appendix A). The first few questions of the interview were purposely easy and light-hearted, to put the interviewee at ease. From there, the questions evolved into more theoretical and reflective topics related to game design. The interviewee was encouraged to think out loud, to be able to capture the thought process and possibly conflicting convictions of the interviewees. Sweeping statements and vague language, such as "good games always put player experience first", were explored with follow up questions. Through these questions, the interviews gained the required depth. At the end of the interview, there was time allocated for the participant to ask questions and give feedback, if they wanted to. At this time, I also reminded the participant that they had the opportunity to have their contribution be anonymous. The recorded interviews were transcribed with the use of online transcribing tool Amberscript.

3.5 The thematic analysis

The transcripts of the interviews have been processed with NVivo. This thesis used thematic analysis (TA) to answer the research question, following the steps as they were proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). TA is the most appropriate tool because it reduces the data from the transcripts into the key arguments. It can show the similarities and the differences between the transcripts. Another important reason for using thematic analysis is that it can lead to "unanticipated insights" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

Braun and Clarke acknowledge that the term "thematic analysis" is sometimes used loosely, which is why they demarcated and categorised the different versions of TA. This research uses a data-driven thematic analysis with a focus on semantic themes. With a data-driven analysis, the researcher looks at themes that emerge from the transcripts. Since there was no precedent for this study, all the codes and subcodes were newly generated based on the data. Braun and Clarke also make a distinction between semantic and latent themes. With this, they refer to the level of analysis. Semantic themes operate at a surface level and describe what is being said, while latent themes operate at a deeper level, and refer to underlying ideas and ideologies, similar to discourse analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). My research question inquires into video game designers' actions and practices, and operates therefore on the semantic level.

The thematic analysis was conducted in six steps: 1. familiarising myself with the data, 2. generating initial codes, 3. searching for themes, 4. reviewing themes, 5. defining and naming themes, 6. producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Step 1. Familiarising myself with the data. In this step, I took the time to close read every single transcript. Transcribing data necessitated paying close attention to what is being said and how it is said. I went over each section multiple times, to ensure that the recording matched with the text. This first step did not include coding, but I did take notes to make sure that I understood the main points from the interview, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest.

Step 2. Generating initial codes. Codes are short phrases that contain the most important element from a section. I divided the transcript into short sections, between one and five phrases, that are about a specific topic. To each of these sections, I have added a code that encapsulates the key message of that section. To keep track of all the generated codes, I used NVivo, a programme specifically designed for doing qualitative analysis. With NVivo, I could easily manage and organise my documents and codes. After the creation of the initial codes, I had 706 codes.

Step 3. Searching for themes. In this step, I collected the codes into the first iteration of themes. I combined similar codes to form one overarching theme. Braun and Clarke suggest that the codes are organised by putting them into a table that they call the *thematic map* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 89). NVivo provides tools to create and combine such tables. Each code was grouped with similar codes. Each group of codes is a subtheme. The subthemes were named appropriately and grouped together with other similar subthemes. This ensures that the themes emerge from the data. This resulted in the initial themes. Codes that did not yet fall under any subtheme or theme were put under the 'miscellaneous' umbrella theme. These codes are kept after the first round of coding because they can still be collected under other themes and subthemes once their definitions have been redefined after a second round of coding.

Step 4. Reviewing themes. In this step, the original transcripts were revisited in order to test if the first iteration of themes accurately captured the essence of each of the segments from interview transcripts. Some of the themes accurately described the data, so they were kept. Others were slightly revised or readjusted to better fit the data. After each round of revisions, the transcripts were revisited again to see if the new codes and themes represented the transcripts more accurately than the previous round. In this step of the TA, the themes are also checked for "internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This is to say, the codes within the themes have to be coherent and similar and the themes should be sufficiently distinct from each other. Themes and subthemes that were too similar were either merged or renamed to underline the differences between the themes. When the codes within one theme were too divergent, the theme had to be split into two categories to ensure that the codes within the themes are homogenous. Often, small categories could be grouped under an overarching theme. The thematic map was completed when the themes accurately reflect the beliefs and practices that are expressed in the transcripts. Each theme is clearly demarcated and different from the other themes (see Appendix B).

Step 5. Defining and naming themes. After the thematic map represented the transcripts accurately, a list was compiled of all themes and subthemes. Each theme and each subtheme was defined with a short text that explains the theme and shows examples of the theme from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Step 6. Producing the report. This is the last step of the TA. The report is the write-up of the results of the TA, constituting of the thematic map and the list of definitions (see Appendix D). The write up will be presented as Chapter 4 of this thesis. Chapter 4 explains the themes and subthemes from the TA and demonstrates how the themes and subthemes reflect the data. Secondly, chapter 4 shows the relation between the themes and between the themes and the codes. Together, the themes form a complete and enlightening overview of the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 93). In addition, Chapter 4 will answer the three subquestions of the thesis: what does the process of writing and designing a video game look like? How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay? How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a video game's narrative?

After performing the TA, the results from the transcripts will be interpreted. In Chapter 5, the conclusion of the thesis, the main research question will be answered with the use of the conclusions of the three subquestions. Finally, chapter 5 discusses the benefits and the drawbacks of using TA for this project and proposes further research.

3.6 Conclusion

In order to answer the research question, this thesis is using interviews to explore how video game designers articulate the writing and designing of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. With Braun and Clarke's six-step guide, a TA was performed to organise the data and get the results. The results will be discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 4.

4. Results

This chapter addresses the main themes that resulted from the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in 708 codes. These codes have been grouped by subject into 16 themes and 43 subthemes (See appendix B). This chapter will discuss the 11 themes that are most relevant to answering the research question. These listed in the table below. Nineteen of the subthemes that emerged from the TA are under the theme for video game narrative. This theme is the largest, since the main topic of the interviews with the video game designers were story-driven games. Some other themes are very small and will not be discussed. Broadly, the order of the topics will be: how interviewees started their careers in the video game industry, what that industry is like, the medium of video games followed by all the different aspects of video games, how all those elements come together in the development process and finally, what the future of video games holds.

With the use of the codes and themes that emerged from the thematic analysis (TA), this chapter will answer the three subquestions from the research question. These three questions are:
- What does the process of creating (writing and designing) a video game look like?
- How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
- How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a game's narrative?

4.1 The interviewees' careers in video games
4.2 The video game industry
4.3 The medium of video games
4.4 Game design
4.5 Gameplay
4.6 Video game narrative
4.7 Emergent systems
4.8 The player's relation to the player character
4.9 Players, agency, choice and consequence
4.10 The video game development process
4.11 The future of games.

Table 2: The themes resulting from the TA

4.1 The interviewees' careers in video games

The interviewees were asked to briefly talk about their educational background and how they found a job in the video game industry. Out of the twelve interviewees, four had a background working in theatre, film and television, four followed an educational programme that was aimed at getting into the video game industry, three had followed an educational programme in liberal arts fields and one got into the industry without higher education.

In describing the career path that the interviewees went on to get into the game industry, three interviewees mentioned that a career in video games was thought by their surroundings as an unconventional career path (Interviewee 2: "It [video game design] wasn't really like considered to be like a normal career path or something you could just typically do."). Three interviewees described their path into the industry as "sort of accidentally" (Interviewee 4: "But yeah, that was kind of how I got into the industry, which is kind of a happy accident.") and two others described their path into the industry as "lucky" (Interviewee 12: "So how did I how did I get into game

writing? I was very lucky. Is the short version of that story."). Three interviewees responded that they had worked purposefully to get into the video game industry (Interviewee 10: "I did put in effort to get into there [game company]").

The interviewees held very diverse job positions, including editor, director, narrative designer, lead writer on sidequest content, lead narrative designer, principal writer, senior designer, and independent game designer. Four of the interviewees reported to have over fifteen years of experience in the video game industry. Six out of the twelve interviewees mentioned that there used to be no specialised education for becoming a game designer. Two of them added that those programmes do exist now. Five interviewees described that they did not know what they were doing at the start of their career, and that the majority of their knowledge, they had to learn along the way.

> I knew nothing about how video game production worked. I knew nothing about how design worked. … And so it was kind of that first year that I was sort of working … was kind of a crash course in how games were put together. (Interviewee 3)

> I mean, I was a complete novice, … I was the only person [writing] and I was working directly with designers and programmers and the artists. So, for three and a half years, I essentially had a paid internship in video game development. (Interviewee 5)

4.2 The video game industry

This theme talks about the way in which the industry functions, focusing especially on the difference between AAA companies and indie companies.

Four interviewees talked about AAA video games as being conventional, typical or mainstream (Interviewee 2: "Like, the kinds of games that I make are typically kind of structurally, narratively typical. You know, they're not like, trying to push boundaries with the structure of the narrative."). Three interviewees put forth a reason why the AAA industry is not experimenting with its structure. Firstly, they argued, the AAA industry is already earning so much money that there is very little incentive to change. Secondly, to keep AAA companies from bankruptcy, they cannot afford to take risks. AAA games have to palatable to a wide audience, because they need to sell a lot of copies of the game to make a profit on their investment. Finally, AAA companies are so large that it makes it nearly impossible for any change to happen. Two interviewees noted that instead of innovative design, AAA companies instead offer a video game that is very masterful in how it presents its typical structure. Interviewees used the word *polished* to describe the attention to detail and the refined visual art style that AAA games have (Interviewee 2: "And so the challenge that we face in the kinds of game development I do is just applying a really high level of polish, a really high level of craft.").

According to three interviewees, narrative in the indie games industry falls at the other end of the spectrum, because the indie games industry can afford to experiment with the design of the video game and the way in which the video game tells a narrative. This is partially due to the fact that the indie game industry has to work with limited technology that demands creative solutions.

> I think you can maybe make the argument for that's why so much more interesting stuff happens in the indie space. Because they've got Unity, they've got Unreal and they've got a lot of smart people going; "How can we screw with this and how can we just work with what we have?" (Interviewee 3)

Two interviewees reported that it is common in the video game industry for game projects to get cancelled. Another interviewee reported that lay-offs are also common (Interviewee 4: "Eventually, as it happens in the industry, there was lay-offs and so I had to go find another job.").

To sum up, interviewee's views on the video game industry rom the interviews it was evident that the interviewees saw a clear distinction between the AAA industry and the indie industry. The AAA games industry tries to achieve a high level of polish. It can be an insecure field of work, because there are frequent project cancellations and lay-offs. The indie games industry cannot achieve the same level of polish, but it can market to a smaller audience and be more experimental.

4.3 The medium of video games

This is the theme that all the codes were grouped under that were about the qualities of the medium of video games, the reasons why people like to play video games and the differences and similarities between video games and other media.

The interviewees offered several reasons for why they thought people enjoyed playing games. Video games allow players to be transported to another world that feels believable and responsive to their actions. Video games can simulate the experience of living out a dream of the player. Interviewee 8 gave the example of being able to live out the dream of being an astronaut and walking on the moon. Two interviewees believed that people play video games because video games allow players act in ways that would not be accepted in real life society (Interviewee 7: "Video games are about violating a lot of norms that's part of the joy of them. You are able in this experience do things that would either get you in trouble or in prison."). Two interviewees noted that some video games require a level of skill, so that completing the video game engenders a feeling of pride and accomplishment.

When talking about the nature of the medium of video games, interviewees often used a comparison to point out the similarities and differences between video games and other media. Two interviewees found in their experience that the principles for good stories are the same across all media (Interviewee 12: "Most of the skills you have as a writer [carry over] between mediums. If you're writing for books or for TV or film or games or radio, the basic philosophies, rules, tenets are the same."). Two interviewees argued that video games are not the easiest medium to tell a story with. As interviewee 5 noted: "if what you care about most is story, video games as a medium are not the best place to do story". He reasons that the interactivity and agency that are unique to video games do not fit together with the structure of narrative. This notion will be explored more in section 4.9 Players, agency, choice and consequence. Interviewee 7 argued that each medium, including video games, has its *artistic license*, which is to say that artists can take some creative liberty from realism or consistency within the storyworld in favour of the artwork. In the case of video games, interviewee 7 states that a certain degree of artistic license is accepted as long as it creates a more enjoyable experience for the player.

> You know Jack in *BioShock* isn't really killing 2,000 people, in the same way people [in musicals] aren't really breaking out in song. It's like artistic license people can live with, … The academic space is much more uncomfortable with ludonarrative dissonance, … but I think the audience is fairly forgiving of things in video games. (Interviewee 7)

While the academic space worries that ludonarrative dissonance breaks player's immersion,

interviewee 7 argues that players actually do not care that much about it. Six of the twelve interviewees made at least one reference to film and television in their interviews. Three interviewees reported that they used film and television writing techniques when writing for video games (Interviewee 5: "I started to use some of the processes that are often used in film or television where I would put all of the story, like, up on on a wall using post-it notes.") However, not every interviewee agreed that video game writing is similar to writing for other media. Interviewee 4 reported a different experience.

> A lot of [people from our] team even came from like TV writing and comic book writing and tabletop gaming and stuff like that. … Everyone who is working at our company has come from different backgrounds, [and they] all say: "wow, this is totally different." (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 2 emphasised the similarities between comics and video games. In comics, the reader has to imagine what happens between the panels to connect them with each other. In games, the player gets to control the player character to move from one plot point to the next. He takes inspiration from the famous comic book artist Scott McCloud:

> McCloud talks about how, when you read a comic strip, it's like… You have like three images. … These are the kind of the atomic moments of the narrative. But there's kind of this magic … in the white space [between] images where you imagine the action, you imagine what storytelling goes on there. And in a way, like I think of the way that I tell stories in a similar way. Like, I create these moments. And then between the moments is space where gameplay happens and that gameplay is a bit more flexible, like, it can be more open. It can be quite divergent in that white space. (Interviewee 2)

An interviewee with a background in theatre argued that video games are most similar to theatre, because the collaborative process of realising a play is similar to the collaborative process of developing a game. In addition, the interaction between the actor and the audience is similar to the interaction between video game and player.

> I think theatre is actually a much more interactive experience than something like film or TV, which games get compared to a lot, because it's on a screen. But that interactive aspect of it, with live theatre, right. Like especially when you're on stage, you feel the energy of the audience. (Interviewee 3)

This is to say that, in game design, the designer has to anticipate a few possible different reactions from the players, and that reaction shapes the video game.

In short, there are some similarities in storytelling in video games and other media, even beyond film and television. However, other media do not offer the opportunity for the player to vicariously (through the player character) experience exciting events and to get a feeling of achievement.

4.4 Game design

Game design is a term that is used both as a noun and a verb. When it is used as a verb, it refers to the process of coming up with what the video game is going to look and feel like. When it is used as

a noun, it can refer to the people who work on designing the game. This can be a separate department at the company, or the combination of several departments including narrative design, art design, level design and gameplay design. The techniques that the interviewees describe were considered good game design. Game designers aspire to attain these game design principles, but that is not a guarantee that they will succeed every time.

Interviewees reported that in game design, the main goal is to ensure that the game experience is going to be entertaining and clear in its goals. Which is to say that the player should not have to guess what the game expects of her or what the game allows her to do. If the game does not clearly communicate its goals, the player can get frustrated. The interviewees mentioned two ways to avoid this frustration. Firstly, two interviewees stressed the importance of consistent and clearly communicated game rules. Interviewee 11 illustrated this with the game *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), which clearly signals to the player which walls are climbable and which ones are not. "You want to communicate that to the player," Interviewee 11 said. "And the player secretly wants it too, I think. … Then you do want to say: this has to always be consistent." When rules are communicated clearly and enforced consistently, the player can start to experiment and play within those boundaries. Interviewee 7 offers that an easy way for players to understand game rules is by making use of signs and concepts that players are already familiar with.

> The more things that are self-evident in a game the better, the more you can rely on things that people already know. On a small level, why games use hot, cold, ice, wind – all these elemental notions: because everybody gets it. (Interviewee 7)

Secondly, four interviewees stated that game designers try to ensure that no matter how the player plays the video game, the video game has to be able to respond to it and accommodate that play style.

> It's your job as a designer to figure out, "Okay, so if they mess up this part of the story, how do we continue the momentum of the story?" instead of saying either "everything's wrecked" or "no, you can't do that"? (Interviewee 6)

One interviewee brought up that, while game designers try to design multiple solutions for a problem, it is impossible to accommodate everything. As Interviewee 6 put it: "if you try to accommodate everything, you'll never get anything done". It is impossible to programme every single possible mechanic into a game, and equally impossible to write a reaction to every single action a player might perform. A different interviewee waves that concern by recounting that in his experience, choices might theoretically be infinite, but in practise there are only a few options that are likely.

> And I mean, there are an infinite number of ways I can walk through a door. But the truth is, I'm only going to probably choose to open the door and walk through it or walk through the glass and shatter it. The number of choices that we want to make as a human being are actually quite limited. So as long as we create scenarios that suggest choices and then we write those choices, players will feel like they've been heard, I think. (interviewee 12)

By accommodating the ways that are most likely for the player to take, and by clearly communicating what the goals are and what paths can be taken towards that goal, the player is

free to explore the gameworld within the boundaries of the game.

When this is achieved, the game design can be considered successful.

4.5 Gameplay

The gameplay theme constitutes all codes that were solely about the acts that a player can do within the game, like running, shooting, swimming, collecting, etc. The gameplay is what makes video games interactive. One interviewee acknowledges that all media are interactive to an extent, in the sense that film and books are a co-production of meaning between the medium and its audience, but with video games, the player has a direct control over the medium (Interviewee 1: "there's a system running in real time and you're changing the behaviour of that system".) When someone is playing a game, the video game responds in real time to the button presses of the player.

The interviewees were asked if they have ever designed a game in which they purposefully broke or subverted gameplay conventions, because it tests whether video game designers are still working to push the boundaries of the genre and inventing new ways for the player to interact with the medium. Three interviewees answered that, in their opinion, it was best to follow the conventions for the ease of the player.

> Much of the standardisation of gameplay that's occurred over time … it actually makes it easier for the player to just suspend disbelief and immerse themselves in the game. So I think that my thought is: you should just go ahead and honour those, probably. (Interviewee 5)

One interviewee adds that the gameplay expectations that the player has from the game can be subverted in *side content* (parts of the game that are not main focus of the gameplay or the narrative), like puzzles and minigames, as long as the player is not required to do it (Interviewee 4: "I think it always comes down to a lot of times that mini games type of stuff. … I think players enjoy that. Again, as long as it's optional.").

In short, game designers mainly see gameplay conventions as useful and are not working to reinvent or innovate gameplay conventions, at least not in the AAA industry, where the majority of the interviewees work.

4.6 Video game narrative

The theme containing all the codes related to narrative in video games is the largest theme to result from the thematic analysis. The subthemes that collected codes that were about the connection between narrative and another aspect of game design (for example: narrative and gameplay) were also grouped under this theme. The main subthemes from this theme are: 4.6.1 Video game narrative over the last decades, 4.6.2 Narrative and design, 4.6.3 Narrative and gameplay and 4.6.4 Narrative and story. The first section serves as a general introduction to narrative in games, the other topics discuss narrative in relation to other design aspects. The final section discusses narrative in isolation.

4.6.1 Video game narrative over the last decades. Six of the interviewees made at least one statement about how narrative in video games has gotten a lot more prominent role in video games, compared video game narratives from the interviewee's youth or from when they first got into the industry. Interviewee 4 said: "Games back when I was growing up, … there was no story. It

was, you know, Pong". Interviewee 7 speculated that this might be because most people working in the video game industry had a computer science or programming background, and there were almost no people with an education in narrative media like film or literature. Programmers likely did not ascribe much importance to video game narrative, or they were only able to come up with relatively simple narratives, because they generally did not have much knowledge of storytelling tradition and theory. Two interviewees mentioned that the focus on narrative increased when studios started hiring writers.

4.6.2 Narrative and design. Four interviewees mentioned that they have used narrative as a starting point for video game design, meaning that they built the gameplay and art around the story for the game (Interviewee 10: "The narrative designer goes: 'Okay, what is the story?' … And from there, game design, level design and concept art create a concept."). This is not to say that in story-driven games, design cannot inform narrative as well. One interviewee was adamant that narrative should be built around the design.

> When approaching a new game, I'm definitely thinking like, "Okay, is this a first-person perspective game or is it a third-person perspective game? Is it, you know, are we looking at having something where the frequency and intensity of combat is very high and occurs very frequently versus a more thoughtful, tactical, stealthy game? …" And then really try to imagine that when developing the narrative as well. (Interviewee 5)

Two interviewees reported that they felt that it was important that there was a narrative explanation for game design choices too.

> So for example, you die and you respawn [come back to life], you know, you have a health bar hanging above your head … narrative games that are really good have a logic for that within their world, in which it makes sense that those things are there (Interviewee 10)

This focus on the importance of narrative in game design is not always self-evident. According to interviewee 7, "Designers, they aren't even thinking of the effects of the narrative because they're designers. So, when I'm in a design meeting, … I have to think of … that balance". This is to say that designers often focus on their own department, and do not think about how the work of the different departments combines to make one game. Designers need to be reminded that the narrative also has a role in the game, which means that sometimes game design ideas need to be let go in favour of the game design.

4.6.3 Narrative and gameplay. In good game design, the goals of the gameplay and the narrative are built on each other. According to one interviewee, gameplay and narrative can even happen at the same time (Interviewee 10: "You can tell that [story] in the gameplay just fine."). Another interviewee tentatively suggested the term "ludonarrative consonance" as a counterpart to Hocking's term "ludonarrative dissonance" (interviewee 6). In bad game design, gameplay and narrative are disconnected.

> They [narrative and gameplay] always have to work together. There's definitely been examples of games — I won't name them — where you can tell the narrative team and the gameplay team were just two separate pages and then they just kind of jammed it together. And it's very apparent that they sit next to each other as opposed to working together. (Interviewee 4)

Five interviewees explained that, in their experience, the gameplay came first in the design process. The narrative could then be crafted around the gameplay. In line with Hocking's theory that gameplay has meaning in itself, interviewee 5 stated that "inscribed in the gameplay is already a kind of stance towards the subject matter. And so, you have to imagine and develop the narrative so that it will be consonant with that, instead of dissonant with it".

Oppositely, it is also possible to come up with the narrative first and then think of what gameplays reinforce the themes of the narrative.

> [Good games] are designing systems and gameplay that is meant to speak to and support the narrative in a way that … the actions that you're taking in the game are also a part of the storytelling, (Interviewee 3)

Finally, it is not only important that gameplay and narrative are aligned, they also have to be balanced with each other. One interviewee saw gameplay and narrative as equally important, while another argued that the balance between gameplay and narrative depends on the kind of game that the designer wants to make. What this means is that gameplay-driven games that require skill spend more time on designing the gameplay systems. Narrative-driven games focus more on the storytelling and less on the gameplay.

4.6.4 Narrative and story. The terms story and narrative are used interchangeably by most interviewees. This subtheme includes different kinds of story structures, different types of narratives, narrative design and thesis. Interestingly, five of the interviewees made a distinction between *narrative designer* and writer. Interviewees stressed the difference between narrative design and writing. Narrative design is used as opposed to regular writing for games (Interviewee 1: "as opposed to simply writing dialogue and so forth."). One interviewee explained that the exact role of the narrative designer is still unclear (Interviewee 4: "[Narrative design] is still almost kind of new in the industry, people are trying to figure out what is a narrative designer, what do they do, what do you need to do that?"). Using the term *narrative designer* acknowledges the difficulty of conveying a narrative with all the different kinds of structures and ways of storytelling. According to one interviewee, beginning writers in the video game industry who want to do narrative design work, often do not get the opportunity because they are only tasked with writing dialogue (Interviewee 5 "[Beginning writers] sort of receive a quest and then it's just like: 'write some dialogue to make this sound good.'").

When it comes to narrative design, four interviewees mentioned that they work with a begin-middle-end structure (Interviewee 8: "I think it springs from a basic story that we want to tell, and a kind of journey, we try to put down kind of the beginning, the end and the middle"). This follows Ryan's narrative models, in which most follow that structure (Ryan, 2001b). The beginning of the game introduces something that intrigues the player, as interviewee 4 put it: "I want something that immediately pulls me in and has some type of interesting narrative hook and it just leaves me wanting more".

With this basic structure, it is still possible to implement different types of video game narrative structures, on a scale from very linear to very branching. Linear narrative structures offer only one possible path through a narrative. No matter how the player plays the game, the story moments will always be the same and in the same order. One interviewee described this type of story structure as simplistic. Another interviewee noted that this type of game was the easiest to make. The advantage of creating a very linear story is that the designers have a lot of control. The

story can be crafted in such a way that it has the maximum possible emotional impact on the player. As an example of a game that has a very good linear narrative, eleven out of the twelve interviewees mentioned the video game *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) at least once.

> *The Last of Us*, as much as I love that game, it was a set narrative. It was as much as playing a movie or a TV show as possible. And that's great. (Interviewee 4)

> For me, the number one example of an amazing story in video games is *The Last of Us*. … and that's a very linear story. (Interviewee 5)

One step beyond linear structures are the simple branching structures. These games are still mostly linear except for one or two branching paths. One interviewee expressed some disappointment in these simple branching structures because they are mostly binary and do not allow much room for nuance.

> The chaos meter [from the game *Dishonored 2*] is still a blunt instrument. You don't really get good feedback about how chaotic you're being and also it's really just a binary, right? You're either high or low chaos. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 8 explained that reason why branching narratives in video games rarely offer many different branches is because branching narratives are expensive to make. In addition, they are also more complicated (Interviewee 12: "if you have really big decisions that can pivot a narrative, left, right and all over the place, it becomes exponentially difficult to map and track and provide meaningful consequences to those choices.").

Branching narrative can be implemented on a smaller level with branching dialogue and branching sidequests. Branching dialogue is the cheapest option, because it is usually inconsequential for the rest of the game world. Branching dialogue offers the player a number of choices in what to say to a Non-Playable Character (NPC, a character in the game other than the player character). The NPC gives a fitting response to the player's choice. The dialogue changes, but the rest of the game remains the same (Interviewee 12: "if you are a bit of a mean person, people [NPC's] will reply to you in ways that are defensive … It's not true consequence."). Secondly, the game can offer branching narratives in self-contained sidequests that have no effect on the main storyline of the game.

> Small side quests … can be more self-contained. And they can have lots of branching options because you're going to see that pay-off off really quickly. And it's not necessarily going to have a domino effect across the totality of the story. (Interviewee 12)

One criticism of branching narrative that remains no matter how many branches there are, is the fact that the stories are still predetermined by narrative designers. Two interviewees used the metaphor of a train on rails (Interviewee 6: "When the story feels like it's on a rail, [players] don't like that."). When there are many rails, it might seem like the train can move freely, but in actuality it is still bound to the tracks. This is to say that the story is not really allowed to move in unexpected directions, only in one of the predetermined directions that were defined by the narrative designer.

In addition to the different types of story structures, there are multiple different ways in which video games can tell their narratives. Two methods that were brought up during the

interviews were the use of cutscenes and the embedded narratives. These methods can be juxtaposed to highlight the differences. Cutscenes temporarily take away the power from the player to show a short, non-interactive sequence. One interviewee described cutscenes as the easiest way to tell a story (Interviewee 12: "A cutscene … is the easiest way, of course, because we've seen that done a thousand times."). One drawback to cutscenes is that the player might get frustrated because she is forced to watch passively (Interviewee 7: "I've always been allergic to it as a creator and as a [player] too. I have the controller in my hand I want to take action.").

Oppositely, a video game can also tell a narrative using Jenkins' notion of embedded narrative (Jenkins, 2003, p. 126). This term is synonymous to what one interviewee referred to as *environmental storytelling*. The advantage of embedded narrative is that it does not take the power away from the player, so the player remains in control at all times. She is not forced to watch something if she is not interested (Interviewee 2: "You don't have to engage with it. It was just that the place had an interesting narrative that if you were curious, you could learn more about."). Secondly, it is cheaper to create than cutscenes (Interviewee 10: "Cinematics [cutscenes] and voice acting and stuff, that's just expensive to have, meanwhile environmental storytelling is a lot cheaper."). Again, this shows that designers do take financial limitations into consideration in the video game design process.

The aforementioned narrative structures and kinds of narrative are used to tell stories in games. These stories can contain theses: a broader statement about how the designers believe the world is, or should be. According to one interviewee, many games lack a central thesis, and this lack of a thesis makes many games unmemorable.

> Sometimes you look at a game and you're like, "Okay, the combat is cool and the character is cool and the world is interesting." But at the end of the game … it doesn't really feel like it coalesces into anything that has resonance … [I]t's fun, but it's ultimately disposable. And games where you're like: "I've been thinking about that for weeks or months later." Like, almost every time it's because they have managed to nail that thesis statement about: this is what the game is saying about what the world is. (Interviewee 3)

One other interviewee brought up the thesis that he wanted to share with his game, but most other interviewees did not mention anything about the theses of games, perhaps proving that Interviewee 3 is right in his assessment that this is not a high priority for most game designers. Unlike Bogost (2006) and Flanagan (2008), most interviewees did not see the medium as a tool for social commentary.

The interviewees were asked if they were deliberately subverting or breaking expectations that players might have of a video game narrative. This question gives an idea of how much video game designers are pushing the boundaries of storytelling in video games. Three interviewees replied that that depended on the type of game that they would be making, since every type of game has different narrative expectations. Two interviewees responded that they liked to challenge the expectations of the player by creating stories that were more emotionally mature and nuanced than players would typically expect of a video game.

> You want people have an expectation of what a certain type of game is, and then … throw in a story element that is maybe a bit more mature or something that games don't really go into a lot. (Interviewee 4)

In this sense, narrative designers are working to advance the level of storytelling to get it up to par with TV and film. They are not so much experimenting with novel ways of storytelling. For the types of narratives that are only possible in video games, players will have to turn to emergent systems.

4.7 Emergent systems

Emergent systems are game design systems that allow for outcomes that have not been predefined by a writer or narrative designer. This is also why emergent narratives are sometimes referred to as unauthored narratives. Sandbox games are an example of emergent games, since this type of game simply provides a gamespace and a range of tools for the player to experiment with, but this does not mean that emergent games have to be entirely unstructured (Interviewee 1: "It's a structured narrative. But what happens within there, it doesn't have to set out in a linear or authored way.") Two interviewees took the game *XCOM* (2K Games, 1994) as an example of a game in which the emergent systems work very well.

> [*XCOM*] creates this kind of emergent narrative of what missions you go on and which of your soldiers, you know, do well and who dies and all this kind of stuff. And I was fascinated by how video games could create that kind of narrative experience and that you can become very attached to these virtual characters. (Interviewee 5)

One interviewee posed that emergent systems are a unique strength of video games (Interviewee 1: "It's unique to the medium. It is somehow native to the medium. It's what we do and nobody else does."). Despite the enthusiasm for emergent game design, he admits that most narratives that result from emergent systems often lack the depth that regular, authored stories have. This is because the emergent narratives do not follow the structure of an authored story, with a set-up and a resolution.

4.8 The player's relation to the player character

Because players take control over the player character, they often use the first person to talk about what the player character does in the game. Interviewee 10 recounts the time when a friend told her about his experience playing a game and telling her: "'I went somewhere into that dungeon and I had to beat a monster and come back in one piece'". The player unifies herself with the player character, which is to say that the player thinks of the player character as a virtual (idealised) representation of herself, also referred to as *avatar* as opposed to *player character*. Unification goes further than identification, in which the player feels emotionally strongly aligned with the character. Game designers have to decide what kind of character their player character is going to be. Designers can lean into that unification, or use other ways to get the player invested in the player character or actively work against unification.

Two interviewees found that the player can unify the player character with herself if the personality of the player character can be filled in by the player. Both these interviewees mentioned that the first-person perspective, in which the player sees the world of the game through the eyes of the player character, is a useful tool to get the player to think of the player character as herself. One interviewee added that for one project that he worked on, the designers initially chose for a silent player character. By choosing a silent protagonist, the character cannot say things that the player would disagree with.

For a long time [in development], Deliver Us the Moon was a first-person game and at

some point in that, there was a decision made for a silent protagonist, because you actually have to unify yourself with the astronaut. (Interviewee 11)

Two interviewees brought up the downside of choosing to play into the unification of the player and the player character. In order to ensure that there is no conflict in opinions or motivations between player and player character, the player character undergoes what interviewee 7 refers to as "desaturation" of the personality. The personality of the character is toned down so that the player can project her personality onto the player. One interviewee adds that when the character has no strong desires, they are not interesting as protagonists for the game.

> [Desaturated characters] have no point of view. They have no thing that they clearly want. They can't say that they want. It creates this sort of meandering thing. … It's the same sort of linearity of a story where you'd have a central character, but then we stripped the "want" out of it. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewees named two reasons for why they felt that unification is not a requirement for the player to sympathise or identify with the player character. One interviewee mentioned that the fact that the player has to act for the player character already heightens the connection between the player and the player character (Interviewee 11: "you show more empathy, because you now have to start thinking for that person [the player character]"). Another interviewee added to that by saying that the player is always going to play the character in her own way.

> You are playing as [a character], but it's going to be your version of that. … And so we say here is the story that's going to happen, but here we're going to give you the opportunity … to kind of make your character your own. (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 10 suggested that there are two ways in which the designer can excite the player to play as a certain character. Firstly, the player character can be a cool and amazingly skilled, which makes the character fun to "inhabit" while playing. Interviewee 10 gave Nathan Drake from the *Uncharted* series (NaughtyDog) as an example of a hero with special abilities that make the player want to play as this character. Secondly, if the character is not a skilled hero, they can still be interesting to play if the player has a lot of empathy for the player character. Interviewee 3 adds:

> It isn't about the [player] going: "would I make the same choice?" It's about going: "do I understand the choice that's been made?" It's about it's about empathy above all. (Interviewee 3)

Two interviewees brought up that recently, the game *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog, 2020), the sequel to *The Last of Us*, has experimented with purposefully creating a friction between the player and the character, by forcing the player to do things with the character that the player does not want to do, in order to continue playing the game.

> To me, this is de first time that a game actively plays with that dissonance with its [player]. As a player, you're now being forced to push this character further in a direction that you actually don't want, and to me, that is a very exciting force of friction. (Interviewee 11)

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In short, there are three ways the interviewees mentioned in which the players can be positioned in relation to the player character. Players can have an avatar, play as a character they sympathise with, or be made to play characters that are unsympathetic.

4.9 Players, agency, choice and consequence

Along with emergence and interactivity, interviewees saw agency, choice and consequence as defining features of the medium of video games. These elements are taken into consideration at every step in the design process. In this section, interviewees explain what they mean when they use the word agency, how they look at agency and how agency factors in with the other elements of the design process.

Four interviewees brought op agency as an important quality of video games. If players have agency, it means that they are to make their own choices. Interviewee 7 described player agency as the greatest strength and weakness of the medium of video games:

> The player is our greatest strength and weakness as a developer. The player will do things you don't want them to do always, but that's a feature and a bug as we say, that gives them that joy of agency. (Interviewee 7)

Two interviewees agreed with the idea that player agency is sometimes seen difficulty for the designer. Interviewee 5 explained that story and agency are forces that are sometimes opposed to one another.

> There is a tremendous tension, or a tremendous conflict between the agency and interactivity that the player expects, because it's fundamental to what the medium does best and the need in a story to precisely structure the rise and fall of challenge and revelation and all of that. (Interviewee 5)

One interviewee agreed that some games solve this problem by not telling a structured narrative. One interviewee brought up that he felt that, even in an environment where the range of player actions are limited, like in the game of chess, he still felt like he had full agency because he was entire free to choose how he would act within those boundaries.

> My brain hates it when I'm given agency in a system, and then it is taken away from selectively to form a story. … if I'm playing chess, I feel I have full agency, … there's a set of rules in the game, but I'm free to act however I want to within those rules. (Interviewee 1)

What this means is that agency is not limited by the amount of choice the game offers, but by inconsistency in the application of the game rules. For players to feel like they have agency, the actions that the player is allowed to take within the game should also be consistent. At the same time, Interviewee 1 also acknowledges that this is not always a possible, because it makes it really difficult to tell a story. Together with two other interviewees, he recognised that players want authored stories in their video games (Interviewee 1: "I know that people crave story, right? That's something about [video games] that people crave."; Interviewee 3: "In the end, there's something in our brains that are hard wired to appreciate stories."). Despite the fact that players say that they want authored narratives, two interviewees claimed that the thing that the narrative that players remember most from their game experience is the emergent narrative that they created in their

own play-through of the game (Interviewee 10: "Narrative is more than a story, … it is also the story that the player creates herself within the gameplay".)

Five interviewees talked about how they viewed the importance of choice and consequence in games. One reason to implement consequence is to make the game world feel "alive" (Interviewee 12: "The world feels alive. It's a small thing because it's little references to other things that you've done, but it makes it feel like the world has heard you and has responded to you.") and "reactive" (Interviewee 6: "[consequence] gives the illusion that the world is like, incredibly reactive to everything"). When the world responds to the influences of the player, the player is more invested in the story.

> We're going to give you the opportunity … to make the choices, to kind of make your character your own, which also makes it something that, I think, you invest more heavily in when you're playing these games (Interviewee 4).

One interviewee added that the consequences to the choices can be unexpected, as long as they are logical. He gives the example of *Fallout: New Vegas* in which a group of helpless warriors become war criminals if the player gives them too much power.

> They commit war crimes and they wind up being executed. And that's your ending. But you did it. And people are just like, "holy crap, I never would have thought that the designers would have allowed us … the super ridiculous way of solving the quest. But we do." (Interviewee 6)

In short, game designers recognise the difficulty of telling a story in which the player plays an active role. A player has agency when she is free to experiment with the mechanics that are at her disposal. Her agency is taken away when the game limits her possible actions in certain scenarios for the benefit of the story. Some interviewees dislike this, but they recognise that this is often necessary in story-driven games.

4.10 The game development process

This section describes what the game development process looks like. Interviewees often shortened development to "dev". The designers listed many different departments, including gameplay design, narrative design, programming, art and quality assurance (QA). They also listed all the different types of documents that they create to help with the game design process. While there are some basic shared elements in video game development processes, one interviewee emphasises that the process "is different at every studio and maybe even every project" (Interviewee 11).

As mentioned in previous sections, the game design process can start with an idea for a story or an interesting gameplay mechanic. According to one designer, the most important aspect of early stage game development is that all departments need to come together to decide what the themes and pillars are going to be (Interviewee 11: "design documents get discussed thoroughly, so that we, as a team, think the same and uphold the same pillars."). If this is not done at the beginning of the process, there is a high risk of ludonarrative dissonance later (Interviewee 11: "I think that dissonance gets into the concept [of the video game] early on and you have to catch it early.").

When the main pillars of the game are decided, interviewee 8 says that it is time to "lay

down some key points that we want to tell or want the player to experience." If the video game is not based on pre-existing intellectual property (IP), then we writers also have to start putting together a "world bible" or "lore bible" that explains what the environment and the characters look like, how the world functions and what the history is of the fictional world in the game.

> [The lore bible] talks about the world and like, you know, what are the inhabitants doing and what are kind of the different types of biomes the players are going to come across and, you know, what are they going to see? (Interviewee 4)

With the directions in the world bible, the art department can start to sketch out the digital spaces of the video game (Interviewee 8: "Next, you get a sketch in the engine in which we kind of decide the world").

To experiment with gameplay ideas, designers create a *grey box.* This is usually a large, rudimentary virtual space where different mechanics can be tested. Interviewee 2 described how he used a grey box to "experience each one of those [gameplay elements] in space to see how they all fit together". During early development, there is a lot of communication between departments (Interviewee 5: "I am working with writers. … I am working with artists and designers. But that's something where I'm meeting with people like maybe five to ten hours a week."). Based on the progress and the feedback of different departments, game designers go back to iterate on their work. The importance of iteration was underlined by three of the interviewees.

> "You're never going to get it right the first time. You can come up with everything on paper, but then when you make it, it doesn't work. Well, then you iterate and at some point, it does start to work." (Interviewee 10).

As one interviewee notes, the direction for the game can still change a lot during this stage of the project.

> "With early game development, it's a little tricky, though, because a lot of times you're going through so many iterations of figuring out what the game actually is, that those goalposts are constantly shifting." (Interviewee 4)

Two interviewees mentioned that, when designing the game, it is important to keep the limitations of the engine (the software programme that the game is built in) in mind (Interviewee 4: "It's all about, kind of, what your engine and kind of what your game can do. And again, how comfortable you are kind of pushing it."). When there is an agreement on the narrative, gameplay and art design, the designers can start working on a "vertical slice". As one interviewee explained:

> "You take a very small section [of the game] and well, we just take that to the highest level, so you know what you're kind of going to have to do across the whole game. And then you finish it." (Interviewee 8)

A vertical slice is a good way to test how feasible it is to make the game. Interviewee 8 adds that if the desired level of polish cannot be reached within the scheduled timeframe, the high expectations for the video game in its totality are likely unattainable. With the knowledge from the vertical slice, designers can readjust their goals for the game. As interviewee 8 said, game designers

have to "find the balance between maximum quality versus the breadth". Once the balance is decided upon, designers can continue working on the game.

      With branching narratives, one writer mentioned that it was useful to have a document with a list of all the choices in the game, especially when the video game is in a later stage of development. With the document, the designer team can easily write the quests in the game in such a way that they can make references to earlier choices that the player has made. In the document, designers keep track of all the possible choices that the player can make when playing the game.

> When you're making a quest, it's just impossible to be aware of what every other writer is doing in all their quests, but you can see what facts are being checked for. (Interviewee 12)

The test levels of the game that are created by the design team are then tested by the QA team, whose task it is to find small programming mistakes or oversights in the game (in the game industry often referred to as *bugs*) and ways in which the player could accidentally or purposefully "break" the game. The QA team finds and report these ways to the design team to fix the problems before the game gets released. One interviewee, who used to work in the QA team, explained that these teams are often divided into two groups, the art testers and the quest testers. The art team tries to break the game by trying to break the physics of the game. They try to break through the barriers of the game (Interviewee 4: "so like you have a team that's testing art and they'll be … jumping in the corners and trying to escape off the world map and stuff like that."). The quest team tries to break the quests of the game by doing the opposite of what the quest wants the player to do. This way, they test whether the quest can handle unexpected player behaviours.

> A lot of times, [quest testers] are looking for all the edge cases. They want to see how badly they can break the game and do all the stuff that you wouldn't expect them to, so it's always horrifying in a way, when you're watching them play, because you're like: "Where are you going? What are you doing?" (Interviewee 4)

Even though there is a lot of communication between players, one interviewee still expressed that he felt amazed at the final product.

> I was always surprised that when I played it— even making it, I didn't have a full appreciation for the kinds of expectations set up in the mind of the player. … we each work on our own little slice of the cake. And so, you don't get to see the whole thing until it's done. (Interviewee 2)

The interviewees did not bring up sound design, marketing, user interface (UI) design, but even without those it is clear that game design is a multifaceted process. The game does not begin with a perfectly clear image of what the game is going to look like and play like, instead, the designers have the to find though iteration and trial and error what is fun and what is feasible. The interviewees' recounting of their experiences shows that it is a long process that requires employees to work on their own part of the game and communicate with employees in other departments.

4.11 The future of games

At the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked how they envision the games of the future, the direction that the medium will develop in and what future narrative in games will look like. One important factor that was mentioned by six of the interviewees was the development of technology. Some of those interviewees argued that technology was the biggest limiting factor in the development of narrative in video games.

> Arguably, the processing power and the technology is not quite there yet. (Interviewee 12)

> The less the technology is an obstacle, the more the designers become enabled. … So I actually think that they can only become more creative. So soon you'll just see something from very cool writers that they couldn't do twenty years ago. (Interviewee 8)

Two interviewees stated that video games as a medium are pushing the technology to be able to get to this level faster (Interviewee 12: "because these different projects are individually pushing the same technology, the technology is growing exponentially.")

Six interviewees mentioned that they saw possibilities for VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) in the near future.

> VR is one of those things, for example, that is trying to get off the ground, you know, with Oculus and all that. But it's finally seems to have created a little bit of a foothold and it's slowly getting there. It hasn't blown up … but I think the opportunities are there. (Interviewee 4)

Four interviewees were especially in AR and VR as formats for video game narratives.

> I think as far as the narrative space, that [VR], to me is something that's super interesting. To be able to tell very immersive stories. Being able to engage in the world the way you never have before. (Interviewee 3)

> We're reaching the point now with VR and AR, where we have new methods of sort of physical interaction, … new ways to physically navigate through spaces that aren't bound by a mouse or a controller. AR obviously allows us a new way to interact with the real physical world with an overlay in it. And those can all be aspects of storytelling. (Interviewee 5)

With the heavy on focus on technology, it is clear that the interviewees did not think that better stories were possible without innovations and better tools. This implies that they feel that they themselves are already telling the best possible stories with the current technology. This is somewhat contradictory to some video game scholars like Janet Murray (1997) who argue that audiences and video game designers still have to find ways to make the best use of the medium.

4.12 Answering subquestions.

With the results from the TA, the subquestions of the research question can be answered.
4.12.1 What does the process of creating (writing and designing) a video game look like?
This question was answered in section 4.10 The game development process. To sum up, the most important aspects of the video game development process according to the interviewees was

communication and iterating. The process starts with an idea, this can be a narrative idea or a gameplay idea, and then the designers have to decide together on what pillars will be most important in the game. By deciding on these pillars, the development team avoids dissonance between departments at a later stage. Next, the departments can work on their own part of the game. Narrative designers write the world bible, gameplay designers test gameplay ideas in a grey box and artists can create assets. This is the stage in the process when there can still be a lot of change in the goals of the project. Ideas are constantly iterated upon based on feedback from other departments. Once every aspect of design is decided upon, programmers put all the aspects together to create a vertical slice to test the feasibility of the realisation of the game within the allocated timeframe. If the desired level of polish is found to be achievable, the designers can work together to finish the game, while continuing to iterate and collaborate. The QA team's job is to try to "break" the game so the bugs can be fixed before the game gets released.

4.12.2 How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
This question was answered in sections 4.5 Gameplay and 4.6.3 Narrative and gameplay. Interviewees were familiar with Clint Hocking's notion of ludonarrative dissonance and agreed that is was a valid concern to look out for when designing a game. When designers are conscious of the possible disconnect between narrative and gameplay, it is possible to create a game in which the narrative and the gameplay are reinforcing each other's themes. Usually, the game design process starts with either a gameplay idea or a narrative idea, which means that one design element has to be built around the other. In later stages, they can also inform each other: narrative can influence the gameplay and vice versa.

4.12.3 How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a game's narrative?
The interviewees brought up agency, choice, consequence and the fact that games need a player as defining features of the medium. The answer to this question is an amalgamation of sections 4.2 The medium of video games, 4.6 Video game narrative, 4.7 Emergence, 4.8 The player's relation to the player character, 4.9 Players, agency, choice and consequence.

The player was taken into consideration at every stage of the development process of a video game. One important factor of game design is deciding how the player is supposed to relate to the player character. Some interviewees argued that the fact that the player has control over the player character makes the player care more about the character. This meant that designers could design their character to have more personality while maintaining the bond with the player. When designers wanted the player to unify herself with the player character, they often opted for a first-person perspective and a less opinionated character.

Big choices and consequences can be difficult to implement in a video game, because choices can have a domino-effect across the game, which means that large portions of the game have branching paths and every path needs to be designed. Every branch costs time and money to design, but the player might only experience one of those branches, which means that large branching narratives are not very cost efficient. It is therefore more cost-effective and less time-consuming to implement choice and consequence on a smaller scale, in dialogue or in self-contained narratives like sidequests. If players have enough choice, they will feel like the world is alive and reactive to their input. Designing for all possible choices is impossible, so interviewees stated that they instead select the options that are most likely and then add one or two more unexpected choices. These unexpected choices give the player the illusion that the game is able to

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accommodate for more choices than it actually can.

Agency was the feature of video games that video game designers appeared to see as the biggest difficulty to design in congruence with narrative. Agency goes beyond choice because it is supposed to give the player the freedom to go off "the rails" that authored narratives are on. Emergent systems can be used to give the player agency. However, emergent systems do not have authored narratives. Interviewees acknowledges that emergent narratives are often not as interesting as authored narratives. When developing a game, designers have to choose whether they want to prioritise authored narrative or agency. Authored narratives often require that some rules are temporarily suspended in favour of the story, and that the outcome of the narrative is predetermined by the narrative designers of the game. Emergent systems give the player agency, but they produce less interesting narratives.

In short, the medium-specific qualities of video games were mostly used in service of creating a more immersive narrative space to get the player invested in the game, even if it happens at the cost of the narrative, like in emergent systems. For the interviewees, the first priority was to use the unique qualities of video games to create a video game that players want to engage with.

The answers from the subquestions will be used in the next chapter, Chapter 5, to answer the main research question of this thesis.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, twelve video game designers were interviewed with the aim to answer the question how they articulated the craft of writing and designing meaning in story-driven video game narratives. Chapter 2 provided the theoretical background for the study. It presented an overview of the history of the medium of video games and a discussion of the theoretical framework that formed the backbone of this thesis. The overview of the history of games showed that the medium of video games is still relatively young in comparison to other media. The practice of using video games as a storytelling medium is even younger. Academics tried to theorise the way in which the interactivity of the medium influenced storytelling. The theory was used as a guide in the interviews. It was used as the basis for the questions and offered a common language to discuss video games between interviewer and interviewee. In the results chapter of this thesis, the answers of the interviews were compared with the theory. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

5.1 Answering research questions.

The results from the analysis were reported in Chapter 4 to answer the three subquestions of this thesis. Those questions were:
- What does the process of creating (writing and designing) a video game look like?
- How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
- How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a game's narrative?
In answer to the first question, from the interviews it became clear that interviewees saw collaboration and iteration as the most important foundations of the design process. Gameplay design, narrative design, art design, the QA teams and the programmers have to continuously work together to ensure that all game elements work together in the final product. In answer to the second question, video game designers articulated the interplay between story and gameplay as two forces that each can carry their own meaning. When the story and the gameplay are not created with the same themes in mind, this can lead to a disconnect between the two, or in the extreme case a dissonance. However, gameplay and story can be aligned. The story can be created to support the narrative and vice versa, creating a ludonarrative consonance. In answer to the third question, the medium-specific qualities of video games, like agency, choice, consequence were mostly used in service of creating the best possible experience for the player, not only in service of creating the best narrative. While narrative is a part of the player experience, it was not the end goal for the designers to create the best possible story. This is to say that in some cases, the narrative will be temporarily put in the background in favour of the gameplay, agency, or other aspects of the game, as long as it benefits the overall experience of the game.

With the answers from the three subquestions, the main research question can be answered. That question was: how do video game designers articulate the crafting (writing and designing) of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives?
From the interviews, it was clear that video game designers are aware of the problems that the academics describe (ludonarrative dissonance, the friction between authored story structure and player agency), and encountering the problems in their design process. However, they accept that they sometimes have to make compromises in order to be able to complete the development process of the game within the allocated timeframe and budget. There is not always a solution to the game design problem, so designers deal with dissonance either by avoiding the problem or by

finding a balance that they think the player will find acceptable. This is the artistic licence that a designer can take. For example, the problem of the friction between agency and authored narrative structure can be avoided by building an emergent system that omits authored narratives altogether. True agency only exists in emergent systems, where the outcome of the narrative is not pre-written. This means that true agency cannot be coupled with authored narratives. A friction between the wants of the player and the wants of the player character can be minimised by taking away the player character's personality. Interviewees do not claim that these are the perfect solutions, rather that players are content with the current solutions.

According to the interviewees, creating an enjoyable player experience should be the first priority of game designers when designing a game. While narrative is a part of the player experience, it is not the focus. Merely having a good narrative does not guarantee an enjoyable player experience. There might be some experimental indie games that do not have player enjoyment as a priority, but for the majority of games, AAA and indie, the video game designers intend to create an enjoyable experience for the player. Video game studios are companies that need to make a profit to remain in existence, and the best thing that video game designers can do to ensure that their video game makes a profit is to make the game enjoyable to play.

Video game designers understand that there is an artistic license to video games, which means that a video game does not always have to be entirely consistent with its own rules as long as it benefits the player experience. Sometimes, the gameplay is temporarily prioritised over the narrative to keep the game fun for the player and vice versa.

Interviewees rarely brought up the intention that they had for the meaning or central argument that they wanted to convey with the game, indicating that most interviewees did not think of video game narrative as a tool to raise awareness for social or political causes. However, game designers are mindful of the meaning in their video games and how elements in the game design can contribute to a meaningful narrative or a meaningful gameplay experience. Instead, video game designers wanted to give games meaning through narrative and gameplay.

Interviewees working in the AAA industry said that their game design methods are rarely experimental. In general, game designers choose to follow the design and narrative conventions for AAA games. Especially in the gameplay design, adhering to the gameplay norms is done for the comfort of the player. The less time the player has to spend learning how a gameplay system works, the faster the game can start to challenge the player in a way that is fun to the player. The game can be challenging, but the player should know what she has to do in order to win or advance to the next level. In other words, the challenge should arise from the skill level required from the player, not from the player having to guess what to do.

With regards to narrative, interviewees stated that the storytelling has changed a lot in the last decades, and that narrative in games got a lot better when the video game industry started hiring writers. Writers that specialised in video game storytelling describe themselves as narrative designers. Narrative designers are aiming to continue telling better stories by giving video game stories more emotional depth than the player expects, but they are not experimenting with the way in which video game narratives are told. Most stories follow a classic beginning-middle-end structure similar to other media.

The AAA industry does not experiment much with narrative and gameplay conventions for two reasons. Firstly, AAA companies are so big that it is very difficult to change the game design process. The structure of the company does not allow for experimentation. Secondly, the AAA companies invest a lot of money in a game (often ranging from 50 to 70 million euros) and they have to make a lot of profit to survive. Finally, they face a lot of competition from other AAA

companies. This forces AAA companies to follow conventions and player expectations, and it does not leave much room for pushing the boundaries of what video games are or experimenting with the form.

The interviewees, of which the majority works in the AAA industry, stated that they felt that any breakthroughs in gameplay and narrative will likely come from the indie space. The indie space does not have the big budgets and the latest technologies that the AAA industry has, and, therefore has to be more creative when looking for solutions to problems. In order words, the interviewees believed that scarcity would lead to creativity.

At the same time, the interviewees stated that they saw video game technology as the limiting factor in the design of video game narratives. For video game narratives to improve further, they would require technological advancements first. Especially in the regions of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality and emergent systems.

Overall, video game designers' opinions aligned largely with the academic theory. There were no big rifts in which the stance of the video game designers was opposite to that of the academics. The only difference was that they were more practically minded.

5.2 Implications

Future academic research on video games might want to focus more on this concept of artistic license. This shifts the focus away from the viewpoint that friction between agency and narrative structure, or ludonarrative dissonance are "mistakes" in the game. Instead, academics could focus on why the game breaks its own rules or themes and what that could say about the game. For example, a game that makes is impossible for the player to shoot her own teammates and vice versa might be unrealistic, but it can heighten the player's feeling of safety when her player character is amongst teammates. It mimics the feeling of safety and comfort in friendship, and it can make the player feel more connected to her teammates. In this case, the artistic license has benefitted the overall playing experience and given meaning to working in a team. Conversely, a game that does allow for *friendly fire* (a military term used to describe the act of accidentally shooting at a teammate) demands constant positional awareness of the player and heightens the tension.

For people outside of the academic space, the findings of the research could give video game designers, video game journalists, people who aspire to be video game designers and people who play video games a better understanding of how the industry functions and what the priorities of the video game designers are. For people who are not very familiar with games, it demonstrates the thought and the skill that goes into game design. It could lead to more appreciation for video games as a medium.

Based on this research, this thesis suggests that video game designers might want to consider focusing more attention to the central argument that they want to convey with their games, as this appears to regularly be overlooked by video game designers.

5.3 Discussion and Limitations

Video game designers are a difficult group of people to contact, because they do not disclose their contacting information publicly. Undisclosed video game design projects are often protected under Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA's), which means that designers are not allowed to disclose information to outsiders. Because of this, video game designers can be hesitant when they are approached for an interview. Despite this difficulty, twelve designers agreed to an interview, the majority which were employed in a narrative department at a AAA company, including some high-

profile video game designers. In-depth interviews were very suitable for this kind of research, because by recording and transcribing the interviews, it was possible to obtain many more valuable insights in a 45-minute timespan than a 45-minute survey could have. It was clear from the interviews that the interviewees enjoyed talking about the topic that they themselves were also interested in and they were very forthcoming with their views and experiences. However, the group of interviewees was not very diverse in gender and nationality and occupation within the video game industry. Eleven out of the twelve interviewees were male, one interviewee was female. Four of the interviewees came from the Netherlands, seven came from the United States and one came from New Zealand. Lastly, eleven of the interviewees were employed at USA, Canada and Europe-based AAA companies, only one interviewee was an indie video game designer. These regions, together with Japan, are the epicentre for AAA video game production, which is to say that there was no input from video game designers from new and upcoming regions, like Southeast Asia and Latin America, who might have a different approach to video game design and narrative.

The thematic analysis was a well-suited method for finding themes in the transcripts of the interviews, especially since game designers often jumped from topic to topic whilst talking. Because the codes were later reorganised by topic, the interviewees could speak freely without being bound to one topic. Because of this freedom, it was possible to find new and unexpected outcomes. With the method, the large quantity of sentences in the transcripts were easily reduced and organised into sections, codes and themes. The codes were named very close to the original words from the text to accurately reflect the statements from the interviewees. This ensures that the research is high in validity. It offered a structured approach to analysing and discussing the transcripts, which makes the method replicable and therefore reliable. Because TA is a qualitative and not a quantitative method, the frequency of the occurrence of codes says nothing about what percentage of the group of video game designers hold a certain belief. To make statements about frequency, one would have to do a quantitative study, for example in the form of a survey. However, the purpose of this research was to find out how video game designers articulate the crafting (writing and designing) of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives, and for this purpose, interviews and the thematic analysis were the best methods.

5.4 Future research

I suggest three directions that researchers can go in to further expand on the work of this thesis.

Firstly, it could be insightful to interview indie game designers in a follow-up study, to see if they can further expand on the perceptions that AAA video game designers have of the industry, and if their practices are significantly different from AAA designers. For example, do indie video game developers feel that their work sector necessitates coming up with creative solutions because of technological, financial and workforce limitations? If so, what kind of solutions and how did they come about? Do indie video game designers feel that they are pushing the boundaries of the medium of video games forward with innovations in game design (whether this be in narrative, gameplay, art, agency, etc.)?

Secondly, if researchers want to further study narrative in video games, it might be interesting to do more research into story-driven video game development outside of the US, Europe and Japan. Do video game designers in Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America use the same narrative structures as the Western games? Do they offer perspectives in their narratives that Western video games do not? For this study, researcher might want to conduct interviews with non-Western video game designers about how they construct narrative and meaning in games and whether this is different from the Western perspective. Another option is to do a qualitative

content analysis on a number of non-Western games. Researchers can choose a number of video games and analyse how those games use visuals, audio, music and

Lastly, it could be interesting for academics to do a case study of the development process of a AAA game and follow along from start to finish. Instead of depending on the answers from video game designers in interviews, researchers could follow along with the creative process themselves. This research could provide detailed answers to the questions like: what are the steps that the development team goes through to create a video game? What does the creative process entail and who is involved in this process? How do the different departments communicate? Do the departments have a certain approach to their tasks in the game design process? When the goals of the different departments clash with each other, who or which department has the deciding power? This proposed study gives a holistic overview of every step in the production process. The difficulty with this sort of study is that the AAA game design process can take several years. For that time, the researcher would take a silent, observing role. As discussed previously, video game companies are quite secretive, so the researcher would need to sign a non-disclosure agreement. If there is a AAA company that would consent to letting a researcher sit-in on meetings and observing the working practises of video game designers, it could lead to interesting insights into the craft of video game development.

5.5 Closing remarks

This thesis has contributed to the study of narrative in video games by adding the creator's perspective of the medium through interviewing video game designers about their views regarding narrative and meaning in single-player narrative driven games. While the views of the video game designers were not drastically different from those of the academics, it has provided more nuance to the more principled stances of the video game scholars in favour of a more practical approach to video game design, especially with regards to feasibility, player enjoyment and artistic license. This practical point of view should be taken into consideration in future video game studies.

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Title, Developer, Year, Publisher

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Donkey Kong, Nintento, 1981, Nintendo
Fallout: New Vegas, Obsidian Entertainment, 2010, Bethesda Softworks
Fortnite, Epic Games, 2017, Epic Games
Home Pong, Atari, 1975, Atari
Minecraft, Mojang, 2011, Mojang
Myst, Cyan Worlds, 1993, Brøderhund Software
Night Driver, Micronetics, 1976, Atari
Phantasmagoria, Sierra On-Line, 1995, Sierra On-Line
Pong, Atari, 1972, Atari
Rocket League, Psyonix, 2015, Psyonix
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Space Panic, Universal,1980, Universal
Spore, Maxis Software, 2008, Electronic Arts
Tetris, Alexey Pajitnov, 1984, Tetris
The Last of Us, Naughty Dog, 2013, Sony
The Last of Us Part II, Naughty Dog, 2020, Sony
The Sims, Maxis Software, 2000, Electronic Arts
The Stanley Parable, Galactic Cafe, 2011, Galactic Cafe
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Appendix A

Table of participants

Name	Current occupation	Examples of games the interviewee worked on (not including unreleased projects)
Austin Grossman	Freelance narrative designer	*Deus Ex* (Ion Storm, 2000), *Disney's Epic Mickey* (Junction Point Studios, 2010) *Dishonored 2* (Arkane, 2016)
Blake Rebouche	Senior quest designer at Guerrilla Games	*Star Wars: The Old Republic* (BioWare, 2011) *The Elder Scrolls Online* (2014, ZeniMax Online Studios) *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017)
Drew Holmes	Lead Writer at Ubisoft	*BioShock: Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2013) *Far Cry 5* (Ubisoft, 2018)
Jason Barnes	Lead designer at ZeniMax Online Studios	*The Elder Scrolls Online* (2014, ZeniMax Online Studios)
John Gonzalez	Narrative director at Smilegate Barcelona	*Fallout: New Vegas* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2010) *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017)
Josh Sawyer	Studio design director at Obsidian Entertainment	*Icewind Dale* (Blackwind Studios, 2000) *Fallout: New Vegas* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2010) *Pillars of Eternity II* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2018)
Ken Levine	President at Irrational Games	*BioShock* (Irrational Games, 2007) *BioShock: Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2013)
Koen Deetman	Founder and CEO at KeokeN Interactive	*Deliver Us the Moon* (KeoKeN Interactive, 2019)
Lars Korendijk	Co-founder, game designer, art, programmer and writer at Knuist & Perzik	*Wuppo* (Knuist & Perzik, 2016)
Merlin Woudstra	Game Designer at KeokeN Interactive	*Deliver Us the Moon* (KeoKeN Interactive, 2019)
Raynor Arkenbout	Lead narrative designer at KeokeN Interactive	-
Sam Gill	Principal writer at Respawn Entertainment	*Ice Age: Avalanche* (Gameloft S.E., 2015) *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (Ubisoft Entertainment SA 2018)

Appendix B

Consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Anna Konijnendijk

Home address: Heemraadssingel 176B, 3021DL Rotterdam

Email: 480755ak@eur.nl

Phone number: +31 6 3652992

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about crafting (writing and designing) narrative in video games. The purpose of the study is to understand how game designers embed meaning into video game narratives, taking into account the medium-specific qualities of video games and the interplay between narrative and gameplay.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to personal experiences with and views on game design and narrative in video games.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make a recording of our interview with Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

A. As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information, such as place of employment, in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym and/or only using general identification, such as gender and/or age.

B. I am aware that participating in this study may involve the participant accidentally disclosing confidential information about upcoming games and projects. Any information provided in the interviews will exclusively be used for academic purposes. However, information may still be redacted from the transcripts. I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study —unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.).

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately forty-five minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish— Prof. Dr. Jeroen Jansz, who supervises this research project at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, using the following email address: jansz@eshcc.eur.nl and/or phone number: +31 6 15326334

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you do not need to sign this form. In order to minimise risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Da

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	D

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix C

Topic list

The interviews are roughly divided into three sections:

Section 1: Introduction (+/- 10 minutes)
This section is designated for small talk, putting the interviewee at ease, establishing good rapport, going over the informed consent form. I will also use this time to explain the purpose of the interview, introducing myself and my motivations and getting to know the interviewee and their career.

Section 2: Main interview (+/- 30 minutes)
This section is used to answer the research question. It will be guided by the questions below. As interviewer, it is my job to ask follow-up questions, ask interviewees to elaborate on their answers and try to get in as much depth as possible. Halfway through this part, it would be helpful to summarise the conversation and refer back to any earlier questions. The same can be done at the end of this section.

Section 3: Concluding remarks and thanks. (+/- 5 minutes)
In this section I will round off the interview. I will ask if the interviewee has any further questions. The interviewer can decide at this point if they want to participate anonymously or not, if they haven't done so already. Finally, I will ask if the interviewee knows colleagues/fellow game designers who would be willing to also participate in the research project.

Section 1:

1. Small talk
2. Start recording for informed consent
3. Go over informed consent form
4. Introduce myself and project.

How do video game designers articulate the crafting (writing and designing) of meaning in single-player story-driven video game narratives?

Subquestions of this topic are:
What does the process of creating (writing and designing) a video game look like?
How do video game designers articulate the interplay between story and gameplay?
How do video game designers utilise the medium-specific properties of video games, like interactivity and play, to support or challenge a game's narrative?

- Interviewee introduction and icebreakers
  - What was the first game you owned?
  - What is your favourite game?
  - How did you get interested in game designing?

Section 2:
Can preface by stating that silence and taking time to think is not bad, if interviewees feel comfortable, they can think out loud.

1. How did you end up in the game industry?
2. What is your position within the company?
3. What, in your opinion, makes a video game story good?
4. What is your approach to designing a video game?
5. How do you balance story and gameplay?
6. Do you try to consciously divert from game making conventions? if so, how?
7. Embedded vs enacted narratives: how is the game balanced?
8. How is the role of the player taken into consideration in the design process?
9. How does the game communicate with the player? What needs to be communicated?
10. What is the full potential of narrative in video games and how do you reach it?
11. What do you want the player to take away from your game?

Examples of follow-up questions:

Can you elaborate on that statement?

Can you describe [term] in your own words?

Is there an example that comes to mind?

Section 3:
- Round up the interview
- Thank the participant
- Ask for questions and feedback
- Ask for references to colleagues
- Ask if they want to be anonymous or named
- Final thanks and goodbye

Appendix D

Codebook and NVivo results table

Appendix D1: Codebook

Theme	Definition
The interviewees' careers in video games	This theme contains all the codes pertaining to the interviewees' educational backgrounds, how they got into the video game industry, what positions whitin the industry they work in and used to work in.
Video Games	This theme includes all the general statements about the nature of games. What they are, what they are supposed to be and how this medium compares other media.
The video game Industry	This theme is a collection of all the all the codes pertaining to the video games industry and how it functions. This category clearly contrasts the AAA video games industry and the indie games industry.
Game Design	This theme includes all general statements the interviewees made about game design. Game design was seen as the overarching process of making a game, including gameplay design and narrative design.
Gameplay	This theme contains the codes that discussed gameplay, excluding the codes that talked about gameplay in relation to narrative. This subtheme is gathered under the narrative theme.
Narrative	Narrative is the largest theme to result from the TA. It contains all the codes and subthemes relating to story and narrative in any way. Since the focus of the interviews was on narrative, this theme also contains the subthemes that combine narrative with other factors in the game design process, like the subthemes "Narrative and Gameplay" and "Narrative and Game design".
Emergent system	This term was used by the interviewees as opposed to Narrative. Narrative implies that someone (a writer or narrative designer) has made up the stories that the player gets to experience. These are also called authored narratives. Emergent systems, on the other hand, create interactions and gameplay moments that have not been predetermined. Emergent systems can lead to emergent stories, but these stories are not authored or prewritten. This category includes all the codes pertaining to emergent systems, emergent narrative, unauthored narrative, emergent design and emergence.
Future of video games	This theme includes all statements about interviewees' predictions for the future of video games, including advancements in technology, future trends, AR, VR and AI developments, the cultural practise of gaming and the evolution of narrative in video games.
Game Development Process	This theme contains all the codes detailing the steps that it takes to create a game from start to finish.

Hobbies and interests	This theme listed all the codes that contained the hobbies and interests of game designers that led them to want to be game designers. These hobbies include writing, gaming and tabletop roleplaying.
The player's relation to the player character	The role of the player in relation to the player character was brought up frequently during the interviews. All the codes about player, player characters and NPC's and how the player relates to them are collected under this theme
Players, agency, choice and consequence	This theme is a collection of the factors that, in the eyes of the interviewees, are the unique strengths of video games. This theme includes all codes pertaining to player agency, choice and consequence.
Rambling	This was the only code that could not be grouped under a theme or subtheme. The interviewees often made remarks about their own way of speaking.
Technology	This theme includes all the codes about the current video game technology. The kind of gameplay it enables and its limitations.

Appendix D2: List of codes and how often they were referenced

Code name	Files referencing this code	Total number of references
Career in Video games	0	0
Career after start	0	0
15+ years experience	4	4
Applied for job and got it	2	2
Asked by other company	1	1
Built company from nothing	1	1
Building a network	1	1
Building test plans to get into design	1	1
Created own company	1	1
Gets better and better at making games	1	1
Got a promotion	3	4
Got into the industry as QA tester	2	3
Got into the industry as webdesigner	1	1
Got into the industry by luck	2	2
Got into the industry semi-accidentally	3	3
Got into the industry through internship	1	2
Had some connections in the industry	2	3
Had some experience	1	1
Inexperienced company	1	1
Job includes writing for other media as well	1	2
Lot of responsibility	1	2
Started making games by copying others	1	1
Started own company	1	2
Starting writers now have to work separate from the rest of development	1	1
Studio went bankrupt	1	1

Unconventional way into the industry	1	2
Was asked to join studio	1	1
Was hired as screenwriter in film industry	1	1
Worked as editor	1	1
Worked as screenwriter	1	1
Worked on IP games	1	1
Works as director	1	1
Works as lead	2	2
Works as lead narrative designer	1	1
Works as lead writer on sidequest content	1	1
Works as narrative designer	1	1
Works as principal writer	1	1
Works as senior designer	1	1
Desire to tell bigger stories through games	1	2
Desire to work in AAA industry	1	1
Did not know video game designwas a career option	2	2
Did not see the connection between game and writing	1	1
Education	0	0
Background in acting	1	1
Background in film and television	2	5
Background in theatre	2	2
Background in writing	1	1
Did not fit in at school	1	1
Game designers are rarely very academically schooled	1	1
Liberal arts background	1	2
Liberal arts background is common	1	2
More people getting into the industry were schooled in game design	2	2
Now there is specialised education for video games	3	3
Purposefully working to get into the industry	3	3
Self-taught skills	2	2
Some video game educational programmes dont teach the right things	1	1
Studied film	1	1
Studied game design	1	1
Studied literature	1	1
Hard to get into the industry	1	1
High school diploma	1	1
Inexperienced in writing games	1	1
Learning along the way	5	10
Lots of different paths into narrative design	1	3
Love for AAA story driven original IP games	1	1
Managed video game player teams in competitions	1	1
No clear path into video game design	1	1
No video game writing experience can be an advantage	1	1
Not a very typical job	1	1
Period without job	1	1
There used to be no specialised education for game design	6	7

Took long to find a job in game design	1	1
Took on a very different job	1	1
Tried to play games casually	1	1
Unprepared for video game writing	1	2
Video game design as unorthodox career	3	3
Wanted to create a space sci-fi game	1	1
Wanted to create another AAA company in the Netherlands	1	1
Wanted to start working in the industry as soon as possible	1	1
Was searching for career options	2	2
Went into game design after school	2	3
Emergence	0	0
Emergence as unique quality of video games	1	2
Emergent game design	0	0
Emergent game design as allowing true agency	1	3
emergent game design as blank canvas	1	1
Emergent game design as short moments of story	1	1
Emergent game design as the future of games	1	7
Emergent game design done right results in a story	1	2
Emergent game design has a sameness to their stories	1	1
Emergent game design has goals and freedom within the track	1	2
Emergent game design is equal collaboration between game and player.	2	3
Emergent game design is not authored	1	1
Emergent game design is not quite a story (narratoid)	1	1
Emergent game design is not the same as a sandbox game	1	1
Emergent game design is not unstructured	1	3
Emergent systems can be structured	1	1
Emergent gameplay within boundaries	1	1
Emergent narrative	0	0
Emergent narrative as flexible and unpredictable	1	1
Emergent narrative as new	1	1
Emergent narrative does not follow storytelling rules	1	1
Emergent narrative is congruous with the world	1	2
Emergent narrative is difficult to predict	1	1
Emergent narrative is like fan fiction	1	1
Emergent narratives are less interesting	2	2
Emergent narratives are not stories	1	1
Emergent narratives show consequences of decisions	1	1
Narrative is also emergent narrative	1	1
How to give player driven stories the same amount of emotional depth	1	1
Improvisations character storytelling in video games	1	1
The chance of missing out makes a moment in games more special	1	2
Unauthored (emergent) narrative	0	0
Unauthored narratives are player generated stories	1	1
Unauthored narratives can be very engaging	1	1
Unauthored narratives result in sandboxes	1	1
Future of games	0	0

Breakthroughs are difficult but possible	2	2
Full potential has never been reached in anything	1	1
Future narrative	0	0
Big potential for narrative in future games	2	2
Collaborative storytelling as interesting future	1	1
Full potential of video games has not been reached	3	3
Furthering interactivity as storytelling tool	1	1
Future games do not focus on storytelling	1	1
Future games where players can create their own story	1	1
Future games will be focused on the immersion experience	1	1
Future games will be unique to each person	1	1
Human writing is still required in future games	1	1
In the future, video games might find a new form of storytelling	1	1
Looking for new solutions for narrative	1	1
Narrative in games is still in its infancy	1	2
VR and AR as interesting narrative spaces	4	5
Working to find ways to tell meaningful non-linear stories	1	1
Future of games is impossible to predict	1	1
Future Technology	0	0
Adaptive learning as interesting future	1	1
AI development might hit a plateau	1	1
AI will lead to interesting, novel, immersive games	1	1
AR and VR as interesting future	3	5
Enhanced reality	1	1
Future technology will enable writers to write better and more diverse stories	1	1
In the future, people wont be able to distinguish video game from real	2	2
Lifelike AI is coming in the future	1	2
Neurolink helmets in the future	1	1
High realism in future video games lead to real trauma	1	1
In the future, past games will be unrecogniseable but a necessary step	1	1
Medium of video games is still in its early stage	1	1
No worries about implications of AI relationships	1	2
This phase of video games is crude but required for the next step	1	1
Trends are hard to predict	1	1
Video games can reach their full potential in this century	1	1
Game design	0	0
Art and design as separate	1	1
Borrowing from other games and genres	3	5
Building anticipation through design	1	2
Creative and weird solutions make the world feel like a creative play space	1	1
Designers have to take all kinds of players into account	1	1
Designing in such a way that the game cannot be broken	1	1
Dynamic that does not need words to be understood	1	1
Emotions can come accross powerfully without words	1	1
Favouring player experience over realism	2	2

Game design and programming as separate	1	1
Game design and QA relationship is important	1	1
Game design as chain of pearls	1	1
Game design cannot produce enough linear content	1	1
Game design makes use of universal, iconographic knowledge	1	2
Game design should be collaborative between departments	3	6
Game design should understand the process of each department to be able to communicate	1	2
Game design takes time effort and dedication	1	1
Game designer also has to play games	1	1
Game designer needs to continue after a players chooses a different path	2	4
Game designers work on their own little slice	1	1
Games that do not use elemental iconographic knowledge are hard to understand	1	1
Games without language would be best	1	1
Good game design uses the strength of the medium to its advantage	1	1
Good game systems are consistent with itself	2	3
Immersion and engagement	0	0
DUTM reached very high engagement	1	2
Games are immersive because they require focus	1	1
High engagement is important	1	1
Immersion has no clear definition	3	3
Immersion is the difference in experience between two players	1	1
Immersion means a focus on what's inside the magic circle	1	1
Immersiveness cannot be compared	1	2
Narrative consistency helps with immersion	1	1
Impossible to accommodate every option in game design	1	1
Limitations of be budget necessitates game conventions	1	2
Multiplayer	0	0
Multiplayer games use space for ambient storytelling	1	1
Multiplayer narrative as solution to ludonarrative problem	1	1
Multiplayer narrative is inexhaustible	1	1
Other kinds of dissonance are possible	1	1
Players paying attention triggers certain responses from the game	1	1
Players should be able to play how they want	3	6
Quest design is a different branch of design	1	1
The game has to accommodate different play styles	1	1
The world needs to feel believable	2	3
Thinking from the player perspective helps	1	1
Unsolved problems of emergent game design	1	3
Unsolved problems of game design	1	4
Video game design demands a lot of different qualities	1	1
Video game designers can act as a bridge between art movements and the public	1	1
Game Dev Process	0	0
Agency should always be kept in mind during dev	1	1
Art creates the locations based on ouline	1	1
Artists create assets	1	1

Balance between accommodating everything and what is feasible	1	1
Balancing quantity and quality of content	1	1
Beginning game dev on weak points to train them	1	1
Creating spaces in the engine	1	2
Creating vertical slice	1	1
Deciding on key points	1	1
Deciding on pillars early on avoids ludonarrative dissonance later	1	2
Design document is devided in sections to work around linearity	1	1
Designer takes narrative outline and makes design document	1	1
Direction document unique to video games	1	1
Direction documents in addition to design documents	1	1
Discussing with other departments	1	1
Discussions happen over and over without progress	1	1
Doogle doc of facts	1	1
Every department should have the same pillars	1	1
Every studio has a different method	1	1
Experiment in gray box	1	1
Exploring ideas	1	1
Figuring out what the game is	1	1
Game design begins with a thing	1	2
Game dev starts with narrative outline	1	1
Gameplay as starting point for game	1	1
Increase production value	1	1
Inspiration can come from anywhere	1	3
Iterate	4	6
Learn from other games	1	1
Made a lot of mistakes in dev	1	1
Narrative and development	0	0
Narrative as providing structure to dev	1	1
Narrative doesnt always get a lot of attention from dev	1	1
Other narrative formats can be added later, comics, films, etc	1	1
Polish versus experimental narrative	1	1
Prefer working alone	1	1
Programmers put the design ideas together	1	1
QA	0	0
QA is not just playing games	1	1
QA testing art is trying to get out of bounds	1	1
QA testing quests tries to break the quests	1	1
Surprised by the final result	1	2
Time goes fast	1	1
Vertical slice tests feasibility	1	1
Video games change a lot in early game dev	1	1
Work within the limitations of the engine	2	2
World bible	1	2
Game Industry	0	0
A lot of games do not get released	1	1

A lot of people want to be designers	1	1
AAA	0	0
AAA cannot afford to experiment	3	4
AAA company sturcture makes experimenting nearly impossible	1	2
AAA copies innovation when it proves successful	1	1
AAA games are very polished	2	4
AAA games often lack thesis	2	2
AAA games often tell stories in cutscenes	1	2
AAA games use new technology	1	1
AAA is rarely experimental in its storytelling	3	6
AAA looks attract people who have AAA shooter expectations	1	1
AAA storytelling is established	2	4
AAA writing is always collaborative between departments	3	7
Not many AAA companies in the Netherlands	1	1
The AAA industry has no incentive to advance their storytelling	1	2
Ambitious studio	1	3
Common discussion in video game design industry	3	6
Departments have to adapt to work from other departments	1	1
Development teams used to be small	1	1
Even the best studios still face ludonarrative dissonance	1	1
Experimental systems can backfire and disincentivise other companies to try the same	1	1
Experiments and changes in storytelling will come from the indie space	1	2
Game companies cannot suddenly make films, so the story has to be told though video games	1	2
Game dev is a small world	1	1
Game dev is slow, so trends are hard to keep up with	1	2
Game dev is too much work to do alone	1	1
Game dev project get cancelled	2	2
Games are entertainment products	1	1
Horror was a trend in the market	1	1
Indie games	0	0
Indie games are creative in their storytelling	3	3
Indie games can allow itself to experiment	3	3
Indie games can have auteurs	1	1
Indie games has new innovations because of old technology	1	3
Lay-offs are normal in game dev	1	1
Mobile game writing is very restrictive	1	2
NDA	1	2
Online games require unlimited content	2	4
People in the industry are young	1	1
People play outside of their own comfort zone when it is made easy	1	1
Realism cannot be achieved alone	1	1
Responsibilities of job titles vary per company	1	2
There is not one definition of good	1	1
There is space in the game industry for all kinds of gameplay experiences	1	1
Truly novel successful games are rare	1	1

Video game dev is uncertain	1	1
Wrong focus of the industry on creating content	1	1
You can only take a risk if all other game elements are very strong	1	1
Gameplay	0	0
Gameplay expectations	0	0
Expectations of core gameplay should be adhered to	2	2
Expectations of gameplay can be defied in optional content	1	2
Game conventions as ugly and unrealistic	1	2
Games should follow gameplay conventions	1	2
Players learn how systems work and deviation leads to confusion and frustration	1	1
Typical video game dialogue creates the expectation that NPC's will say something	1	1
Unexpected solutions are fun to design	1	1
Unexpected solutions can feel empowering to players	1	1
Gameplay should not always trump over everything	1	1
Interactivity	0	0
Bad games take away interactivity in favour of story	1	1
Games are interactive because the player can change the behaviour of the system	1	1
Games are uniquely interactive	1	1
Interactive enviroments are testable for their logic	1	1
Interactivity demands attention	1	1
Interactivity makes s space feel believable	1	1
Mechanics can be boring	1	1
Puzzles allow for a differnt kind of gameplay	1	2
Reinforcing themes through gameplay	1	1
Games and emotions	0	0
Games can give you a feeling or purpose and accomplishment	1	1
Games have to be relatable	1	1
Good games can be relatable	1	1
Great stories are the best feeling	1	1
Relatable elements are necessary to get people on board with unrelatable elements	1	2
Hobbies and interests	0	0
Always had a passion for games	7	8
Always had a passion for making games	3	4
Always had a passion for narrative in games	4	5
Always had a poassions for role playing games	1	1
Appreciation of good storytelling	1	1
Designing video games as hobby	1	2
Desire to be creative	3	4
Desire to share interesting art movements	1	1
Games played a big role in life	1	1
interest in emergent narrative	1	1
Interest in narrative in video games	1	1
Interest in VR and AR	2	2
Interest in writing	2	3
Likes gorey games	1	1

Lost interest in games at some point	1	1
Lost interest in managing teams after becoming nr.1 in the world	1	1
Love for film	2	2
Played games competitively	1	1
Played games from young age	2	2
Played games with family	1	1
Some exposure to roleplaying games	1	1
Started low-key gaming	1	2
Writing fan fiction	1	1
Narrative	0	0
Authored narrative	0	0
Adding to beginning middle end structure	2	2
All kinds of narrative influence each other	1	1
Authored narrative	0	0
Authored naratives can be great, but rarely are	1	4
Authored narratives are more cathartic	1	2
Authored narratives are often mediocre	1	1
Authored narratives are on rails and offer no true choice	2	3
Authored narratives have too apparent guardrails	1	1
Authored stories are not fake	1	1
Authored stories with player as protagonist are ultimately disappointing	1	2
Enacted narratives are more authored	1	1
Game provide authored stories with the player as protagonist	1	1
Meaningful stories require authored narratives	1	2
Stories with more player agency are not as emotionally rewarding as authored stories	1	1
Story has to follow a certain authored structure	1	1
Beginning, middle, end structure	4	4
Branching dialogue	0	0
Branching dialogue is cheap	1	1
Branching dialogue is not true choice	1	1
Branching Narrative	0	0
Branching narrative is difficult	3	4
Branching narrative is expensive	1	1
Branching narrative is not true choice	1	1
Simple branching narrative	1	1
Cutscenes	0	0
Cutscenes are the easiest way to tell a story	1	1
Cutscenes are the least emergent form of storytelling	1	1
Cutscenes can be frustrating to players who want to take action	1	1
Cutscenes create distance between player and the experience	1	1
Cutscenes have a narrative explaination for taking away control from the player	1	1
Different types of narratives enable different experiences	1	4
Embedded narrative	0	0
Embedded narrative as enviromental storytelling	1	2
Embedded narrative is cheaper than enacted narrative	1	1

Environmental storytelling as optional	1	1
Environmental storytelling as subplot	1	1
Subplots to create an atmosphere	1	1
Games can be a mix of authored and emergent elements	1	1
Good games do not give too much information at once	1	3
Good games give the player a goal	1	1
Good games make the player want to find out more	1	4
Good games start with an intriquing question	2	5
Good narrative depends on what the goal is	1	1
Good narratives skillfully present meaningful choices	2	2
Good video game narratives adhere to basic story tenets	1	1
Linear and simple structure	0	0
Main story desicions are often very binary	1	1
Overall game structure as linear	1	1
Linear narrative	0	0
Linear narratives are like orther media	2	2
Linear stories are the easiest to make	2	2
Linear stories as simplistic	1	1
Linear stories forces people into the narrative	1	1
Linear stories have more emotional control	1	1
The less linear and authored a story is, the harder it is to achieve emotional depth	1	1
Narrative can dissapoint, but that is still better than no narrative	1	1
Narrative can make games better	1	1
Narrative design	0	0
Narrative design as most interesting	1	1
Narrative design as new	1	1
Narrative designer is still a vague term	1	1
Story comes first in narrative design	1	1
Take cinematic lessons and apply choice and consequence where possible	1	2
Theres a big leap generational difference in narrative design	1	1
Writers have to take into account the player and gameplay when coming up with a narrative	1	1
Writing is not the same as narrative design	2	2
Narrative expectations	0	0
Defy narrative expectations by making it more mature, nuanced, with a twist	2	3
Defying expectations in the narrative	1	1
Defying genre expectations for a satisfying story	1	1
Different genres have different narrative expectations	3	7
Diverting narrative expectations	1	1
Does not follow video game narrative conventions	1	1
Genre tropes give the player tools to understand the story	1	1
In open world games, players expect narrative control	1	1
Leaning into narrative expectations	1	1
Narrative has a space in video games	1	1
Narrative has untapped potential	1	1
Narrative in games has to separate from traditional narrative	1	1

Narrative is a sequence of events (emergent narrative)	1	1
Narrative requires structure	1	1
Narratives can also be received passively in side characters	1	1
Open world stories are harder to create	1	1
Sidequests and contained narrative	0	0
Contained stories can offer meaningful choices	1	1
Sidequests are more self-contained	1	1
Sidequests can be more diverse	1	1
Sidequests can have more choice and consequence	1	2
Sidequests offer true choice	1	1
World state changes can exist in contained narratives	1	1
Stories can be told in a multitude of ways	1	1
Story is a subset of narrative	1	2
Storytelling in games is conventional	1	1
Storytelling is about specificity	1	1
The common definition of narrative is too narrow	1	1
Thesis	0	0
Game lacks thesis without character arc	1	1
Games without thesis are unmemorable	1	1
Good games have a thesis	1	2
Good games have thematic through line	1	1
In order to spread a message, the game has to appeal to a big audience	1	1
Some theses are easier to do through games	1	2
Thesis about how to deal with change	1	1
Thesis about how your choices can influence or not influence the world	1	1
Thesis as a warning for how we trat the planet	1	2
Thesis can be spread without making it on the nose	1	1
To teach people new things, you have to be accommodating to their current habits and go from there	1	1
Translating thesis to narrative and gameplay	1	1
Unlimited narrative potential	2	5
Use video game narratives to explore real world emotions	1	1
Video game storytelling is about more than storybeads	1	3
Video game storytelling is also about the characters and the world	1	2
Video game writing takes multiple possibilities into account	1	2
Writing	0	0
Giving little pieces of information	1	1
Inciting incident	1	1
Start the scene as late and end as soon as possible	1	1
Stories on rails are not good	1	1
Use minimal amount of text	1	2
Writers in game industry are often used to prose	1	1
Writing as simple	1	1
Writing dialogue	1	1
Narrative and Art	0	0
Art design creates atmosphere to match the message of the narrative	1	1

Art has an impact on the experience of the narrative	1	1
Narrative and design	0	0
Building a bridge between writing and design	1	1
Consistent rules create a connection between narrative and design	1	1
Creating applied narrative	1	1
Design and narrative can go together	1	1
Design tends to not take narrative into consideration	1	1
Different ways to get through the stories	1	1
Evolution of the combination of narrative and game design	1	1
Game design and narrative are congruent	1	2
Game design rules should inform narrative	1	2
Game design should have narrative justifications	1	1
Game designer creates gameplay and mechanics to support narrative	1	1
Having responsibility for design and narrative forces a better balance	2	2
Narrative and design has to follow the rules that they set up	1	1
Narrative as driving force for design	1	1
Narrative as starting point for game design	2	4
Narrative explanaition for game design rules	2	2
Systems can be built around narrative	1	2
Telling stories in interesting ways	2	2
Tests of logic often fail in narrative games	1	1
The intersection of narrative and game design	1	2
Narrative and gameplay	0	0
Aligning story and gameplay gives a game value	1	1
Bad game design has narrative and gameplay separate	1	1
Balancing the needs of gameplay, art and story	2	2
Balancing the priorities of gameplay and narrative	1	1
Change narrative based on gameplay experience	1	1
Character superior knowledge presents gameplay problems	1	1
Conflict resolution through combat is simple	1	1
Connecting story and gameplay is difficult	2	2
Creating playable narrative	1	1
CYOA games prioritise narrative over gameplay	1	2
Dialogueis okay if the player can act in the meantime	1	2
Different games have different priorities in narrative and gameplay	1	1
Fit gameplay conventions into narrative	1	2
Gameplay and narrative can build on each other	1	1
Gameplay built around narrative	1	1
Gameplay focused and narrative focused design is very different	1	1
Gameplay has an impact on the experience of the narrative	1	3
Gameplay should be prioritised over narrative	1	2
Good games have stories intetrated with the gameplay experience	1	4
In good game design, mechanics support narrative	2	3
Mechanics reinforce the themes of the narrative	1	1
Narrative and gameplay are equally important	1	1

Narrative and gameplay as seperate elements of game development	1	1
Narrative and gameplay comes together in the dialogue	1	1
Narrative and gameplay objectives as separate	1	1
Narrative and gameplay seen by the world as great divide	1	2
Narrative comes after gameplay design	1	1
Narrative design has to take into account how gameplay is experienced	1	1
Narrative has to support the gameplay	2	5
Narrative is built around gameplay	1	1
Narrative though interesting mechanics	1	2
People have the false conception that gameplay and narrative do not mix	1	1
Story and gameplay influence each other	1	2
Storytelling during gameplay mode	1	1
Storytelling through gameplay	1	1
The setting informs the gameplay and narrative	1	1
Utilising mechanics to tell a story	1	1
Narrative in old video games versus now	0	0
Games used to not be story-driven	1	1
Games used to not have a writer	3	3
More games have narrative as driving force	1	1
More narrative in games	1	2
More writers interested in video game writing	2	3
The medium has drastically evolved in 20+ years	1	1
Video game narratives used to be simple	1	1
Video games started hiring writers	1	1
What is considred unrealistic changes over time	1	1
Player and player character and NPC's	0	0
Acting out player character heightens empathy with the character	1	1
Action is character	1	1
Aligning player and character can be done by desaturating personality	1	2
An avatar can make games aimless, because is misses the why	1	3
Characters and NPC's	0	0
Adding in unrelatable characters creates a more diverse palette	1	1
Adding NPC's provides more content, but also ludonarrative dissonance	1	1
Good games have a character arc	1	2
People fall in love with video game characters	1	1
People will have relationships with AI characters	1	1
Story arc for companion character as solution to agency problem	1	2
Strange characters are more fun	1	1
Sympathy for digital characters	1	1
Video game characters are realistic and human	1	1
Forming real relationships from games	1	1
Game dev should not try to model the character after the player	1	1
Is the player character a character or an avatar	1	1
Perspective influences friction between player and character	1	1

Pitting player and player character against each other	1	1
Player can identify with player characters if their character can be filled in by the player	2	2
Player character arc takes away agency	1	1
Player character between blank canvas and personality	1	1
Player does not feel unified with player character	1	1
Player feels unified with player character	1	1
Player guides the player character	1	1
Player has to recontextualise her relationship to the player character	1	1
Players can identify player character if they feel sympathy	1	1
Players can identify with player characters if they are exciting to play	1	1
Players do not have to be the character, only empathise with them	1	1
Players have no control over companion characters	1	1
Recontextualising the relationship between player and player character	1	1
The narrative thas to stay true to the character, not the player	1	1
The perspective influences how the player sees the player character	1	2
The player has to take on the role of player character	1	1
The player is the most important character in the narrative	1	1
The player plays their own version of a character	1	1
TLOU2 creates a friction between the wants of the player and player character	1	2
Truly aliging player and character is impossible	1	1
Player, agency, choice and consequence	0	0
Agency	0	0
Agency is greatest strength and biggest difficulty in game design	1	1
Agency is not limited by rules but by consistency	1	1
Player agency should be acknowledged in the game	2	2
Players get joy from agency	1	1
Players want agency	1	1
Taking agency away is not good game design	1	1
Characterisation through dialogue options	1	1
Choice and Consequence	0	0
Choice can also come from the order of sequences in the narrative	1	1
Choices create immersion in the story	1	2
Consequences can be unexpected but they have to be logical	1	1
Consequences make the world feel reactive	1	1
Every choice has consequences	1	1
Game world feels alive when it remembers and recalls player choices	1	1
Player choice has an effect	2	3
Player choice has to be acknowledged	1	1
Sense of choice is created by dialogue change and world state change	1	1
Video game strenghts are choice and consequence	1	2
Crying players are the best compliment	1	1
Designing choice	0	0
Give and take between game designers and players	1	1
Possibilities are infinite, but in practise only a few are likely	1	1

The game cannot offer infinite choices	1	1
Validating choices even if it doesnt change much	1	1
Game world feels alive	1	2
Player and narrative	0	0
Acknowledging relation between player and story	1	1
Agency and narrative can be conguent, but it is difficult	1	2
Balancing the player control over the narrative	1	1
For a satisfying story, a player can only have limited agency	1	1
Friction between player agency and structure	1	1
Narrative versus agency as opposed forces	2	4
Narrative versus agency question is unproductive	1	1
People want authored stories	3	7
Player agency is consistend in the narrative	1	1
Player can shape the narrative slightly	1	2
Player driven stories do not follow story structure	1	1
Player should not be forced into narrative	1	1
Player weaves the story together	1	1
Players are active participants in the story	1	2
Players are content with current authored narratives	1	1
Players can create their own stories with the structure of the game	1	3
Players can get lost in video game narrative	1	1
Players can resist the story	1	1
Players expect stories	1	1
Players will go along with the story if it offers the right options	1	1
The player should be an active participant in the storytelling	1	3
There is no set balance between authored narratives and choice	1	1
Player experience should come first	1	1
Player has to be acknowledged as active participant	1	1
Player should not get frustrated	1	1
Players act in unpredictable ways	1	1
Players are always limited by the game rules and boundaries	1	1
Players cannot engage if they do not choose to	1	1
Players easily understand combat systems	1	1
Players get bored before the new trend hits	1	1
Players like freedom to explore areas	2	2
Players remember their unique experiences the most, not the story	1	1
Players' conceptions of realism might be different than realism	1	1
Some players understand and other players dont	1	1
The player is made complicit by playing the game	1	2
The player is prioritised over design and narrative	1	1
The player might stop playing if they do not agree with the game	1	1
There is a limit to the level of unrealism that the players will accept	1	1
Rambling	5	8
Self reflexiveness	0	0
Commenting on interactive storytelling (self-awareness)	1	1
Commenting on video game mechanics (self-awareness)	1	1

Technology	0	0
Complicated technology results in a simple narrative	1	1
Digital worlds are more and more accessible for companies due to technology	1	1
Games are not pushing the boundaries of AI right now	1	3
Games are pushing technology	1	1
Limited technology of the past informs current game design	1	1
People need to understand technology before it can be used for narrative purposes	1	1
Sharing technology advances the medium	1	1
Technological advancements not required for furthering narrative in games	1	1
Technology as limiting factor for immersion	1	2
Technology has not evolved far enough yet	1	2
Technology influences narrative	1	1
Technology is growing exponentially	1	1
Technology needs to go through a few iterations before it cathed on	1	1
The direction of development in technology is unpredictable	3	5
The medium is the message, McLuhan	1	1
Video games	0	0
(Comparison to) other media	0	0
Comics	0	0
comic panels are narrative moments	1	1
The gutter of comics is the gameplay	1	1
Video game compared to comics	1	1
Each medium has different limitations	1	1
Every medium has some artistic license that people accept	1	3
Every medium is interactive to an extend because it requires the reader to participate	1	1
Every narrative is co-authored	1	1
Film	0	0
Approach video game writing like film and television writing	1	1
Film and video games are very different media	1	1
Film cannot unify watcher and character	1	1
Film is also digitising more and more	1	2
Film writing techniques	2	6
Films are passive	1	2
Golden path as the movie of a game	1	1
Television storytelling evolved	1	1
Video game developement compared to film development	1	1
Video games are still very filmic	1	1
Video games can have a more lasting impact than film	1	1
Video games do not have filmic language	1	1
Video games do not have the same control over player as film	1	1
Workpace in television is very high	1	1
Game stories are not fundamentally different from other stories	1	1
Good story structure is the same in every medium	2	4
In no medium does the author have complete control over the reader and the narrative	1	1

It takes time for media to find and utilise their strenghts	1	2
Tabletop roleplaying games are collaborative storytelling experiences	1	1
tabpletop roleplaying games allow for creativity and improvisation	1	1
Take narrative inspiration from other media	1	1
Theatre	0	0
AR similar to theatre	1	1
Film and theatre knowledge led to more interesting narratives	1	1
Game dev is like live theatre because you interact with the audience-player	1	1
Interactive theatre (Sleep no more)	1	1
Interactive theatre is like walking simulators	1	1
Theatre background helps with game writing	1	1
Theatre is collaborative	1	1
Theatre is inherently more iteractive, like video games	1	1
Video game development compared to theatre	1	1
Unknown territory falls back on conventions from other media	1	3
Video game compared to CYOA books	1	1
Video game narrative as theme park ride	1	1
Video game narrative reaching getting on the same level as other media	1	1
Video game writing different from other media writing	1	1
Video games can achieve a level of immersion that other media cannot	1	1
Combat comes out of war gaming history	1	1
Game can have multiple structures	1	2
Games do not have to be long	1	1
Games have a locked point of identification	1	1
Games have proven themselves as art form	1	1
New and exciting field	1	1
Procedural content is not capable of meaningful storytelling yet	1	1
The Last of Us as pinnacle of video game storytelling	2	3
The medium of video games has not yet reached all age groups	1	1
There is little experimentation in what can be done with a format	1	1
Video game criticism	0	0
Academic field of game studies is developing	1	1
Both ludologists and narratologists are right	1	1
Ludonarrative debate	0	0
Ludonarrative consonance	1	2
Ludonarrative dissonance	2	3
Ludonarrative dissonance is a valid concern	1	1
The divide does not exist because it is a designed system on a continuum	1	1
The ludology narratology debate is redundant	1	1
Moving past a binary good bad view on games	1	2
Video game critics and academics are less accepting of artistic license in games	1	2
Video game technology is developing and changing very fast	1	1
Video games are about agency, interactivity, simulation	1	1
Video games are not the best medium for storytelling	2	3

Video games as interactive storytelling	1	1
Video games exist in many forms	1	1
Video games require suspension of disbelief	1	1
Video games that could have been films are not interesting	1	2
Video games will evolve naturally	2	3
Visual language is an important part of game design	1	1
Vladimir Propp does not work in games	1	1
VR and AR	0	0
AR does not immerse	1	1
AR has no magic cirlcle	1	1
AR storytelling as seperate	1	1
VR as more immersive	2	2
VR did not live up to the initial hype	1	1
VR is limited by physical hurdles	1	1
We do not know what video games are yet	1	2
Whatever games people like are good games	1	1
Why people play	0	0
Part of joy of playing games comes from violating normal rules and norms	2	2
People want to be transported to another world that feels real and responsive	1	1
Video games as facilitator for living out dreams	1	1
Video games can evoke unique emotions tied to one's own actions	2	2
XCOM provides an experience unique to video games	1	2