

Possibilities of encounter between Psychoanalysis and videogames: thinking with Freud and Lacan

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Figure 1: A road has many paths

Abstract

This paper discusses a possible approximation between Psychoanalysis and videogames, in particular the contributions that this science, created by Freud and developed by other psychoanalysts, can give to videogames and to the universe that surrounds them. We will show the meeting points between them, as well as their differences. Similarly, we highlight what is possible to learn about videogames when the theory and practice of Psychoanalysis, this centennial area of human study, meets this new object/artifact of contemporary culture, as well as to identify points of provocation for Psychoanalysis today.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, videogames, Freud, Lacan, game studies, game analysis.

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1. Introduction

In many studies on videogames we can find Psychoanalysis and Psychology knowledge not only as a constituent part of the backgrounds of the professionals who produce videogames, but also part of the background of those who research it. Frequently there are citations on the concept of *flow* from Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [Sale and Zimmerman 2004; Shaffer 2006; Novak 2010;

Schell 2011; Rabin 2011], and interdisciplinary studies by New Zealander scholar Brian Sutton-Smith [Sale and Zimmerman 2004, 2006; Schell 2011] about games and play, both scholars now living in the U.S.A. for years. Sometimes we also find references to psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky [Sale and Zimmerman 2004; Shaffer 2006; Singer 2007], Belgian and Russian respectively, and Austrian psychoanalyst Bettelheim [Shaffer 2006; Singer 2007] and their contributions to games.

Less common, but also present in some texts, are videogame studies from the perspectives of Jung's Analytical Psychology [Novak 2010], the Psychoanalytic Theory of Klein [McDonald 2012], and from Psychoanalysis pioneered by Freud and revisited by Lacan [Boyer 2007; Turkle 2011].

Although we will never be able to mention all the important contributors, instead of adding more names to the list, we will turn our attention to the possibilities of an approximation between Psychoanalysis and videogames from a certain perspective of Freud and Lacan. We say "certain" because we understand that psychoanalytic training is based on a triad of *theory, personal analysis and supervised analytic practice*, that is, they are closely related to our professional background choices. It is from this perspective that we will start to situate ourselves, sometimes approaching, sometimes moving away from clinical, political, epistemological, ontological perspectives but always considering the ethics of Psychoanalysis.

In the first section of this paper we will devote ourselves to discussing the possible approximations between videogames and Psychoanalysis, distinguishing fruitful approximations to the development of both areas of study and also listing those that show themselves inadequate because they would be bound to decrease the interaction between these fields of knowledge. In order to do this, we will take into account other studies about the relationship between Psychoanalysis and other fields of study [Japiassú 1998; Eco 2001; Assouan 2012].

In the second section, we will work in more detail on the possibilities of approximation that showed to be appropriate to the development of both areas, specifying their points of convergence. That is, what are the benefits of this confluence? How videogames studies can learn from Psychoanalysis and what can Psychoanalysis learn from videogames studies?

In the last section, we will show and discuss a possible methodology for testing the fruitful encounter between digital games and Psychoanalysis: one that non-psychoanalysts can have access, that is, those who know the theory but who are not clinical practitioners.

The methodology of the study presented here consists of: (a) extensive reading of vast Psychoanalysis literature, (b) application of knowledge of both videogames production and analysis methodologies (c) use of a systematic methodology for analyzing videogames organized in: the researcher playing the game; the researcher observing the moves of a given player, what we call "assisted game play"; semi-structured interviews with players; gathering information about the game in specialized publications. In this methodological framework, we follow methodologies that have been used by authors such as Turkle [2011] and Zagalo [2009], and in Brazil, by Alves [2005], Moita [2007], and Petry [2011], among others.

2. Possible encounters

Since the beginning of Freud's investigations in what would become Psychoanalysis, his attention was always on literature and the arts in general. Very fond of both, he found in classic texts such as *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, *The Sandman* by Hoffmann, in *Fairy Tales*, in *The Purloined Letter* by Edgar Allan Poe, in sculptures like *Moses* by Michelangelo and in Greek mythology - as his text *The Medusa's head* and other texts show - a rich material for thinking about the human condition, the psychological suffering of his patients and the culture of his time.

If these works helped him to understand the human mind, his understanding of it also helped him to look and analyze what psychological issues were present in those works. Moreover, he sought to understand them as the authors' form of expression, always treating them with the admiration of a *connoisseur*. It is not in a

much different way that we will discuss the possibilities of encounter between Psychoanalysis and videogames.

A first possibility to be considered is the psychoanalytic analysis of the characters. Perhaps one of the most analyzed characters in the history of Psychoanalysis is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Did he suffer from some kind of inhibition to action, resulting from a feeling of guilt because of his desire to get rid of his father [Freud 1980c]? Would he be a character that would have some kind of fixation on women's themes or an oral fixation [Ella Sharpe cited in Lacan 2002]? From this perspective we are facing what we call Applied Psychoanalysis, considering the characters as subjects¹ in therapy. Now, how can this approach be appropriate, and start posing questions concerning Hamlet's personality if he "is not a real character" [Lacan 2002]? Characters made of pixels cannot undergo Psychoanalysis either, because the patient cannot enter the analytic dialog circuit that leads to the unconscious, a condition for psychoanalytic work to occur. So this would not be a suitable option considering our way of addressing the issue.

A second possibility to be considered would be analyzing designers through their characters and through the game itself. To this end, the experiences in the application of Psychoanalysis to the lives and works of authors can help us. One of the earliest examples of this approach is the book by Marie Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: a psychoanalytic interpretation*, published in 1933. Freud [1980d], her friend and master, while writing the preface of the book weaves the following observation: "Investigations like this are not intended to explain the character of an author, but they show what the driving forces that shaped him are (...)". Without noticing too much the Freudian comment, many analyses have resulted in real theoretical and, mainly, ethical disasters.

These approaches lead our attention to the relationship between the subject and his work, between the subject and culture, respectively. Although we always start to create something from our personal repertoire, every beginning of creation is the result of the adult's desire to continue playing, daydreaming. In this direction, our work life can have some kind of continuity with regard to our childhood play experiences. In a recent documentary called *Indie: the movie* [Swirsky and Pajot 2012], we noted some reports from various game designers and the relationships between their production and their personal lives. Edmund McMillen, one of the interviewees in the documentary, even says: "To me it (the game *Aether*) speaks perfectly of how I felt when I was little". What can we learn from this example? In a

¹ *Subjects* in Lacanian sense: *le sujet*. Here we follow the translation suggestions of the terms in English adopted by Wilhelm Heim and Michael Richardson, Lacan and Heidegger's translators into English.

certain way everything we produce is a manifestation of ourselves, our ideas, political views, experiences of which we are consciously aware or not. But they are also part of the world we live in, since we build ourselves psychologically as beings-in-the-world. That is, we cannot think of a *being* without a *world* [Heidegger 2006b].

Other studies to challenge the author centered approach of a certain work were done especially by Barthes and Foucault in what regards the themes of writing and the consequent authorship. They proposed that we should turn our attention to the work itself, pay attention to what it said, since the unity of the *self* (*Das Ich*) had been shaken since Freud. Barthes [1988] goes on to say that while writing, it is the language that acts, performs, and not the *self*. All artwork, although starting from a personal repertoire, becomes independent from its author(s) when it meets its "reader", in our case, its player. Authors who deal with hypermedia language [Landow 1997, Hansen 2006] and games [Manovich 2001], tend to reinforce this active role of the player as a narrative path builder beyond the traditional function of a reading or a linear path.

With these two approaches situated in Applied Psychoanalysis, we must remember that, following a remark by Freud, in a way, "artists are on the forefront" [Souza and Pereira 2011]. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* "came before Freud's *Oedipus complex*; Shakespeare's Hamlet was thought before the concept of *ghost* in Lacan, and so on. The perspective that follows Freudian thought would say that the tradition of art and literature poses fundamental questions to the human spirit. From a paradigmatic point of view, today we believe that Sophocles opens - in the phenomenological sense - the Oedipus issue in culture and that Freud responds to it within a clinical theory and culture theory².

After all, Applied Psychoanalysis brings no questioning, no contribution to Psychoanalysis. It is important to make some remarks here against this perspective. McDonald [2012] while doing an analysis of *ICO* used Kleinian nosography to establish comprehensive structures of the game, building some kind of a positional match between situations narrated in the game and the structures of psychological development. Although his analysis of *ICO* brings important and innovative elements, such as when he suggests the idea of a ludic unconscious while proposing an interpretation of the dynamics between the characters Yorda and the Queen, he makes an imaginary fusion that matches them to the Kleinian object relations. At this point, he exceeds in the psychoanalytic nomenclature distancing himself from

2 This is an application of the concept of *influence anxiety* by Harold Bloom (1930) which says that an open question can be answered by the other(s) at different times in different contexts.

the cultural universe of games and approaching the clinical setting, a risky position in the absence of a subject to dialogue.

That said we present a third possibility: the search to understand the game itself. Murray [2003: 93] tells us that "the interpretative framework is built into the rules by which the system works and the way in which participation is modeled." From a pragmatic point of view, we can say that the operation within a world involves the senses and interpretations that pertain to that world [Peirce 1868; Heidegger 2006a].

The designer is the responsible for this. However, even planning a game aiming at a particular kind of experience can produce unexpected reactions and some players' actions may bring about their own new meanings, and, in specific cases, modify the game itself (as in Mods). Based on this aspect, we bring to the forefront a fundamental feature of what a *Game* is: its openness [Gadamer 1997]. In other words, the games should provide opportunities for the player to take ownership of the game and find something new in the elements that were already there, or run down a path that, being unique, is creative, personal, and to some extent, idiosyncratic.

Although each game is designed aiming at a certain possible experience, it is not the experience itself. This experience only happens when a player interacts with what was projected. In this way, the interactions that occur differ from one player to another. As noted by Lacan [2002], if we become emotional at a theatre play it is because of the dimensions of development that it offers to each one of us, in other words, it is according to the relationship established with our desire. This means that we are not moved by the theatre play itself, but by what and how it touches us.

This third possibility would build what we would call Psychoanalysis of Games. At this point we should ask ourselves: is Psychoanalysis of Games really possible? How could it be?

To build an answer to this question, we must first make clear that a game is not a mirror of reality and it will never be because it is fiction. If we consider the digital universe as an extension of human life [Capurro 2000, Petry 2010], the experience produced in the game cannot be thought of as a mirror, but it should be integrated into human cultural activities, such as theater, cinema, etc. [Mannoni 1980]³. It is while a kind of fiction, as a product of the culture, that it may be thought as an *almost unconscious of the real* [Souza and Pereira 2011]. As "an almost unconscious of the

3 Mannoni follows the clue provided by Lacan, in a reading of Koyré that says that any theory involves a structure of fiction. This way of thinking retakes an important element that Heidegger [2006a] had mentioned in *Being and Time*, showing that when a new idea comes into scene in the scientific field, it builds its own history retroactively.

real” it could be read and understood as a revealing lie (fiction), just as the experiences in other situations of that culture. Revealing what?

- **Its creator?** No, because as soon as the game is created, it becomes independent of its creator;
- **Its world?** Yes, but always a particular world (in the phenomenological sense). That is, the world of a particular subject;
- **The game itself?** Yes, and as it reveals itself like a work of art, it says something to everyone and to no one⁴.

The game as “play” is like a fictional, but revealing reality that lies between unconscious and conscious, between psychological reality (of some people) and social reality (shared by almost everyone). As a work is a wish fulfillment that is constructed between the movements of displacement and condensation, between metaphor and metonymy, as Lacan would say, we will never come to the end of an analysis and we will never be quite sure about its effectiveness. However, we can clarify what we are saying. To go further down the road of positive and personifying interpretations would be some kind of *wild psychoanalysis*⁵.

From this point on we think on the possibility of Psychoanalysis being questioned by games, in other words, that it might be constantly surprised by them, as Freud and Lacan did before the works of art (literature, sculpture and painting) because only this way can it have the opportunity of remaking and renewing itself in face of digital culture.

A fourth possibility to be discussed is the use of Psychoanalysis for the creation of characters. This is a viable possibility; however, we should be careful. When we contaminate the playful and concrete origin of creation of the subject of production with external rationalizations we can put the work in danger: it tends to lose its potency. However, in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary creations, be them in design or production, shared or collective, psychoanalytic knowledge can make up character details and provide resources to create the background of a game. Well, Keni Levine, author of *Bioshock*, who was formerly a writer and play director, created *Bioshock* from a panorama of readings of key works of the twentieth century, such as Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984* and Rand's *The Revolt of Atlas*. Building on the legacy of culture is one of the signs of a great work,

4 This is what the phenomenology of artworks teaches us with Heidegger [1967] and Gadamer [1997] when they say that the works of art raise questions to the *being* of man. Likewise, it is what Gilson [2010] says when he claims that ontological issues are also positioned on the side of the enjoyment/artistic fruition of the artwork.

5 The term *wild psychoanalysis* was created by Freud to designate those forms of procedures that perform interpretations outside the clinical setting, especially when they produce diagnostics. As such they were rejected by Freud.

and as Psychoanalysis is a building that has established itself in the cultural landscape of the twentieth century, it may be a matrix or participate in the conception of the design of a game, once we understand which human issues are present in each work.

Another possibility, a fifth one, leads us to remember that Freud used the technology of his time to theorize: considering the internal pressure of locomotives and steam engines, he built the theory of drives; with studies on Geology and Archeology of his days, he thought a topographical model for the psyche (Conscious, Preconscious, Unconscious). After him, Lacan thought the structures of the subject and the human desire starting from Topology and Cybernetics, broadening the Freudian perspective.

The technological revolution continues, and the question we ask is: should we begin to apply one of these technological advancements in theory and practice? An example would be gamification. Can gamification be applied to Psychotherapy? Mike Langlois [2011] believes so. We agree with him when he says that good therapy and good videogames involve the gradual solution of a mystery. Just as the fortune teller in *Baten Kaitos* says: "Someday you will know who you really are", the psychoanalytic work is the path that leads us to make this discovery.

Psychoanalysis teaches us to understand the meaning of knowledge in our lives, and how life, experienced by each one of us, marks us but not ultimately defines us.

Pondering about this, Langlois [2011] even suggests the *Avatar Therapy* for when players (patient and therapist) are engaged in treatment via the virtual world using their avatars. Sigmund Steampunk is the name of his avatar in *Second Life*. Certainly many gamers would enter into dialogue more easily with those who know or are willing to appreciate their culture.

3. Psychoanalysis and games

As we have seen, both Freud and Lacan were able to think the subjectivity of their time by considering culture. Psychoanalysis and games have much in common; psychotherapists and gamers as well [Langlois 2011].

The place of the psychotherapist while playing is opposite to the place of the designer: the psychoanalyst who plays seeks to grasp the ideas, know the characters, the way of gameplay, the effects of the experience on him and on other players, etc. In this way, in the paper mentioned above, McDonald [2012] brings a great contribution, as with the notion of "ludic unconscious" he suggests the psychoanalytic unconscious is involved in how we handle the controls in games. In other words, our actions on our game controls would be subject to the manifestations of our unconscious, determining the decisions of gameplay.

Although the idea that thought does not manifest itself only when we speak or write had already been announced by Freud when he dealt with the formation of the unconscious (dreams, Freudian slips, lapses, etc.), and more recently by Petry [2009] when discussing digital production, McDonald's work brings to the field of game analysis one more element we should consider.

As we may conclude, games are complex objects that are difficult to analyze. However, as Phenomenology and game analysis taught us, each analysis must be constructed from the particular characteristics of each game⁶. In this way, possible aspects to be noted are: script, characters, visual and audio environments, content, features of code and aesthetics, interface, interactive map, gameplay, inventory objects, camera moves and controls. To make it a little more difficult, they need to be examined respecting the field of the language to which they belong, namely, hypermedia [Mannovich 2001] what means that an isolated analysis of each of these aspects is always a partial analysis.

Given this complexity, rather than performing the analysis of a single game, we will make a few comments - supported by Psychoanalysis - on a variety of games, facilitating the understanding of a wider audience of players. In addition to that, we will seek a balance between commercial games and *indie games*⁷.

3.1 The fear experience - *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill 4: the room*, *Limbo*, *Amnesia: the dark descent*

As fear is one of man's most primitive emotions, it accompanies us from our ancestors and, insistently, triggers the "fight or flight" response. Most games teach us to fight, and this is the only alternative to progress: they lead us to try to overcome our fears.

In a comparison of the experiences of fear between *Resident Evil*⁸ and *Silent Hill*⁹ (figure 2), Santos and White [2007] suggest that in the first narrative acts as a life affirming force, an appreciation of the symbolic order that appears repeatedly every time the player finds a typewriter and saves the game. These moments of contact with the writings in the game - with language as a way to record the symbolic - are the moments that allow us to return to safety. On the other hand, in *Silent Hill* there is a deliberate subversion work of what is familiar and of conventions, as it discusses our desire for stability and consistency. The

6 Each game is, in itself, a universe of meanings, possibilities and relationships that structure it as an open work [Eco 1976].

7 The option to discuss only one game limits the number of people who know it.

8 *Resident Evil*, 1996-2012, created by Shinji Mikami. Developed by Capcom.

9 *Silent Hill* created by Keiichiro Toyama and developed by Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo, Creature Labs, Climax Studios, Double Helix Games, Vatra Games, WayForward Technologies.

distance between player, avatar and game, which allows us to feel secure [Murray 2003], collapses because we do not know if we are the killers of our tormentors, or if we are psychotics living in a world removed from shared social reality, like the avatars living in the town of Silent Hill, or if we are also psychopaths just like those who we believe we are killing. The game ends and the order will not be assured: the sensation of abandonment takes hold of the player. This is an increasingly common experience in a world of uncertainty and loneliness as the contemporary world is [Turkle 2011].



Figure 2: *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*

*Limbo*¹⁰ is an indie game that also puts us in an inhospitable world, full of deadly traps (figure 3). The platform game and puzzles were produced in black and white, contributing to the perception that it is a difficult environment to remain alive.

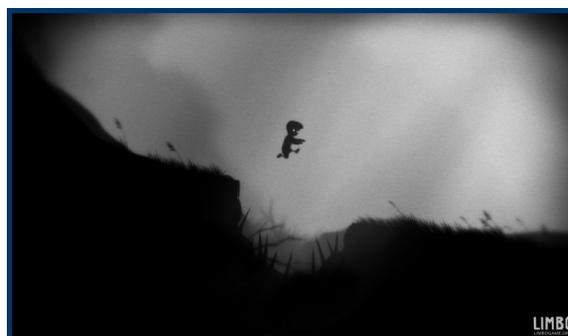


Figure 3: Scene of the game *Limbo*

The player is a little boy who will die many times to go ahead in the game, since it does not give you any information in advance of where the dangers are, and they are often perceived too late for anyone to be able to avoid them. The balance in this respect is restored by the rapid return to the last checkpoint, closest to the "point of death".

Facing the programmed dangers in the world is a way of facing our imaginary fears in a better way, because then they start to have a name, an appearance, making it possible to fight them back.

In contrast, we have the game *Amnesia: the dark*

10 *Limbo*, 2010, is a game created by Jeppe Carlsen, Dino Patti and Arnt Jensen and developed by Playdead Studio.

descent (figure 4) that puts us not to fight against our fears, but in a position to avoid or escape them. This is one of the fundamental ways of man, when he passes from fear to fright and, later, to tremor (panic) [Heidegger 1927].



Figure 4: Encounter in Amnesia: the dark descent

In *Amnesia: the dark descent*¹¹ [2010], the player finds himself in third person and hypothetically awakens in the game with his mind in a whirl of confusion and with a strong sensation of being chased. The indicators of this are primarily in the treatment of dynamic audio of the game, in which we can hear the character's breathing and heartbeat, from fear to chilling and to nightmarish despair state. We awake in the skin of Daniel, in a sinister castle in Prussia, with no memory or evidence of what happened or how we got there. A letter written by Daniel himself reveals that the amnesia was self-inflicted and the continuation of the message suggests finding and killing Alexander, a man who could be found within the deepest and darkest interiors of the castle.

As we see ourselves chased by a mysterious shadow, we have no other choice than to go deeper inside the castle. Escaping from the shadow, finding Alexander, knowing what that feminine scream that we hear is all about. During the game the reminiscences of Daniel's past emerge little by little, and he definitely knows nothing about his past.

Exploring the mysterious paths, the player must also take part in the difficult memories of Daniel. As we take up that place, we feel that horror does not come only from outside, but from inside of us, too. The disturbing odyssey that lies in the dark corners of the human mind lurks at every turn, even when Daniel hides from the malevolent creatures amid the remains of pigs' blood.

With no weapons or resources, the only alternative is to hide. But, what are you hiding from? The only thing left for the player to do is to hide from possible threats, from menacing and fearsome creatures that drive you crazy until you blackout and faint. The game is an

¹¹ *Amnesia: the dark descent* [2010], is a game of Friccional Games, one type Swedish indie studio. Their website is: amnesiagame.com.

experience of survival horror that makes us face extreme situations that men or women are subject to facing one day in imagination or in reality.

Where else can we find a similar experience? Certainly not in *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*, but in Hoffmann's [2010] *The Sandman (Der Sandman)*¹², 1917, which served as motivation for Freud to write a text in 1919 called *Das Unheimliche* [Freud 1980b], translated as *Extremely Uncanny*, deeply aversive, frightening, capable of taking us out of reason with a simple contact. The great advantage here is that the game can simulate this experience discussed by Freud, that is, to put us before those experiences that take us to the limit, in which the boundaries between madness and fear are no longer perceptible, except by our physiological symptoms. This way, *Amnesia: the dark descent* serves as a perfect laboratory of extreme desperation and fear.

3.2 The Bad Wolf Returns - The Path

The Path (figure 5) is an indie game developed by the founders of Tale of Tales, Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, for Microsoft Windows and Mac OS X that has Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale as source. The imagetive-narrative content, consisting of allegory and fable refers to adolescent and youth imaginary worlds [Oliveira and Zagalo 2010].

This game, as well as many others, highlights the idea of play as a limitation exercise necessary for life, just as a young man training for adult work. As Freud [1980a] pointed out in a text of 1913, fairy tales have the potential of becoming objects of psychoanalytic analysis, a point developed by Bettelheim [1980] in *The Psychoanalysis of Fairy Tales*, and revisited by Corso and Corso [2006]. The potential for the analysis lies in the fact that it suggests "remaining obscurities" that Freud, by analyzing the dream of the patient who came to be known as *The Man of the Wolves*, would relate to an infant fear of being literally "eaten or swallowed" by an adult.



Figure 5: The beginning of the road in Path

¹² Hoffmann, E.T.A. 2010. *O Homem de Areia*. Rio de Janeiro. Editora Rocco.

Although often not reporting a happy ending, fairy tales become essential to the learning process of the child by the appropriation of examples of life, an issue clearly explored in *The Path*.

Between the tale of Perrault from 1697 and that by the Brothers Grimm from 1857, the idea of scaring children so that they behave well or to relieve their anxieties by removing the grandmother from the belly of the wolf, *The Path* makes us experience symbolic death and the abandonment of innocence in order to know adulthood.

The game starts in a completely realistic way, just as fairy tales analyzed by Bettelheim [1980] do: six sisters aged between 9 and 19 years in a room of a house or apartment. They should come out to take a basket with food for their sick grandmother who lives in the forest. The player has to choose with whom he will go along the path: Robin, Rose, Ruby, Ginger, Carmen and Scarlet, all with names that allude to red color [Pontuschka 2011]. Although it seems directed to the female world, even when men play the game, they report to feel to be in a fragile position when they find the smarter or older characters of the game. Therefore, the identification is not restricted to girls.

Unlike the Brothers Grimm version analyzed by Bettelheim, in *The Path* there is no clear overlap between the figure of the grandmother and the wolf, but this may be more implicit as when we find the wolf in the woods the grandmother usually does not appear. The game highlights the perception of wolves as figures related to girls and, given the outcomes and the imaginary that surrounds them, wolves are dangerous and, as such, are related to impulses we cannot control.

In *The Path* with the expansion provided by the reticular characteristics of hypermedia [Bairon 2011], different endings associated with the biography of each of the characters are possible, because each of the girls should face a specific wolf: not the same wolf, and usually not in the strict sense of the word. A specific wolf haunts the existence of each girl depending on the age and life history of each one.

As for the ambiance sound in *The Path*, there is an "adaptive music" system [Clark 2007 cited in Oliveira and Zagalo 2010] that generates music in real time according to the state of play. That is, it is an element that drives the emotion of the player. Moreover, the rhymes in children's voices mixed with the gloomy atmosphere of the game announce the encounter between the girls' innocence and eminent danger.

After selecting a character, you must disregard the guidance provided to keep yourself on the path. Entering the forest, after covering the stages of the game and finding the wolf, the player is transported to Grandma's house, where the experience unfolds in first person and the player loses control: the consequence of the path chosen is determined. The open meaning

content happens in the forest where the conditions, actions and events determine what happens next to each character in Grandma's house.

As in all written versions of Little Red Riding Hood, *The Path* is the tragedy of loss of innocence by encountering and having to deal with our greatest fears, many of them related to adult sexuality. As explained in the game's official website: it is a game about growing up [Pontuschka 2011].

As the analysis by Pontuschka [2011] says, the great message of the game is that following the path without venturing into the forest leads you to death without having lived your own life. It is necessary to disobey and renounce maternal safety, advance into the unknown and confront our fears in order to become mature. To follow the path straight down the road is failing in life.

3.3 Gods or Men? - *From Dust*

In *From Dust*¹³ (figure 6), by designer Eric Chahi, the player is invited to play as an ancestral spirit who has the task of watching over early humanity, cycle after cycle, accompanying his people in their evolutionary ascent, organizing and changing spirit and matter, helping them to control nature, giving them powers to save themselves from cataclysms and accompanying them throughout the course of the game.



Figure 6: *The tribal family in From Dust*

The player's performance directly affects the fate of his people, which may have beneficial effects or may even lead them to extinction. In *From Dust* we exercise our fatherly care with regard to things and to our beloved ones or we may succumb to sadistic temptations. The behavior of the player determines the fate of others. That is the equation resulting in a game of indescribable beauty.

¹³ *From Dust* [2011] developed and published by Ubisoft Montpellier.

3.4 The revenge - *Myst*, *God of War*, *Max Payne*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Angry Birds*

Revenge is a fundamental theme in Western history and heavily analyzed by psychoanalysis. It is one of the core themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who must avenge his father's murder committed by his uncle, and who soon after takes his sister-in-law as a wife. Freud considered that in *Hamlet* desire for revenge and the oedipal desire for his mother were intertwined. It is an element of tension with regard to the father figure, also present in the *Myst*¹⁴ series, in which the saga begins with the madness of the sons and the father's retaliation.



Figure 7: Saavedro off to beat us in *Myst Exile*

In the second game of the series, *Myst Riven*, the character around which the plot revolves seeks help from the player no longer to fight against the maddened sons, but now the father himself who now has shown to be a builder of perverse worlds in which he allows his creations to perish without any help.

In the sequel *Myst III Exile* (figure 7) we again have a Shakespearean revenge scenario. Saavedro seeks retaliation against Atrus, who believes to have lost his family during the destruction of Riven. Throughout the story the player's task is to deal with the problem of the revenge planned by Saavedro, having as possibilities to help the poor rivenian in finding his family, to let him become mad in prison or to engage in his quest to find the connection book and return it to Atrus. The drama of fatherhood and the continuous revolt against the father is a constant theme in the *Myst* series coming to the design of an entire race that denies the real and spurious origins of their magical powers, showing in *End of Ages (Myst V)* the collapse of the whole D'Ni civilization.

With different endings and in so many other games, revenge is a frequent theme, and not always against the father figure. It is present in other series such as *God*

of War, *Max Payne*, *Assassin's Creed*, and why not to say, also in the very successful and "innocent" *Angry Birds*.

Other topics are treated in many games, for example, sibling rivalry in *Devil May Cry*, maturing in *Final Fantasy*, the perception of the consequences of our actions in *The Sims*, issues to be discussed in future studies.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we start from a survey of a variety of possible encounters between Psychoanalysis and videogames, all anchored in attempts related directly with the videogames or with other cultural manifestations.

Long ago, one of the authors of this paper, confronted with the studies on Psychoanalysis, "play" and fairy tales [Petry 1988] sought a way to analyze the cultural productions from a Psychoanalysis perspective, an approach that we now bring to the discussion on videogames. However, in this context, the analysis takes a far more complex scale with the necessary knowledge of the specifics that involve the production and manifestations of a game. This is a question of broadening the action of Psychoanalysis towards games: look at their narrative, the characteristics of their characters, but also their mechanics (as we pointed out about the save feature in *Resident Evil*), the interpretative experience of the sound environment (as in *The Path*), the manipulation of controls as proposed by McDonald [2012].

As we have seen, many digital games evoke deep emotions, fears and desires and as games are part of that magic middle ground in which events and characters are "real" bases in which we project what is within us. As noted by Zagalo [2007 cited in Oliveira and Zagalo 2010], "the virtual storytelling has the ability to suggest emotions," and it is possible to produce interactive stories with several emotional competencies.

As stated by Petry [2011], videogames, by providing the experience of other possible *selves (avatars and characters)*, through the exercise of different roles, the experience of making decisions and performing certain tasks - which take place through the controls, buttons and arrow keys - allows the acquisition of patterns of mental action, the moral judgments and the opportunity to elaborate on psychological issues.

Owing to the potential of digital games for the psychological life of individuals, it is necessary to say that the effect of playing a certain game is different for each person. In this way, although Psychoanalysis indicates the potential of games as a support for conflict management, it is the specificity of each one of us as a collector of symbolic elements that might produce some therapeutic effect, and not the game itself. Somehow, when we play, we always play with

14 *Myst* [1993], *Riven* [1997], *Exile* [2001] and *End of Ages* [2005], from the *Myst series* are games developed by *Cyan Worlds*.

ourselves, an issue already brought up by Gadamer [1997] when he says that “to play is to be played” - in every play we are being played.

Bringing us or not to appeasement, the games we play make us work issues present in life psychologically. When we realize these issues are projected on a game we have a chance to deal with them at a greater distance: the detachment we know we have when we are in a game, though sometimes we forget that at various times [Gadamer 1997].

This detachment from social reality that the game provides was worked by British anthropologist Victor Turner starting from Van Gennep and the notion of liminal¹⁵. According to his thought, liminal people, those in passing situations, neither inside nor outside the game, but in and out at the same time, are in position to be more "creative as they are releasing structural controls" [Turner 1974]. Here the potential of gaming experiences for the human psyche reveals itself: a time and space for a new structuration.

By being connected to contemporary culture, Psychoanalysis learns and is renewed by it. It learns more about man when it is confronted with man's desire to expand himself through the adoption of a variety of expression forms; it learns more about the contemporary man and his time when it realizes the themes that man needs to elaborate on and the paths taken to cope with these issues. Psychoanalysis also learns when it lets videogames question it, in other words, when it is instigated to think about them and to have a position with regard to them.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank FAPESP for supporting the ongoing research of one of the authors. We also thank Prof. Lynn Alves (UNEB-Salvador) for her enthusiasm towards this field of research; Prof. Heloisa Feltes (UCS-RS) for the provocation on a previous text; the group of researchers of *A Mansão de Quelicera* project, which we are part of, for the rich discussions on computer games analysis; the cited authors, known or unknown, near and far, for their writings that made us think. Also our sincere thanks to Prof. Maigon Pontuschka (UNIR-RO) for helping with the translation into English.

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15 In the sense of separation, margin (or *limen* in Latin).

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