Playing between Opposite Ideologies with Focalization and Agency

A Look at Ideological Perspective in Narrative-driven Games

Huaxin Wei

School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, huaxin.wei@polyu.edu.hk

Teresa H. M. Leung

School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, teresaleunghm@gmail.com

This paper examines the unique set-up of two concurrent opposite ideologies in narrative-driven games both as a structure and as a technique for game narrative design. Through close analysis of two distinct games – *Ghost of Tsushima* and *Red Dead Redemption 2*, both with a strikingly similar dual ideology design, we observe a range of narrative design strategies that allow the player to build her player character's ideology with agency at both local and global levels. Among them focalization, and specifically internal focalization, has stood out as a prominent approach. Our analysis contributes to the broader theoretical discussion of how narrative perspective exits in games, with detailed findings on techniques of ideological perspective design and the use of focalization in games.

CCS CONCEPTS • Applied computing ~ Computers in other domains ~ Personal computers and PC applications ~ Computer games

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1 Introduction

In narrative-driven games, how players perceive the happenings and events in the gameworld and respond to them with actions and choices is highly influenced by various narrative techniques blended into gameplay by game designers. Among these, perspective as a design aspect plays a critical role in how a player's perception and experience is framed during gameplay. In current game studies literature and game design textbooks, discussion of perspective is largely confined to the game's spatial point of view, which is simply divided to two design choices: first-person and third-person camera views. Nevertheless, it is critical to create narrative perspective that goes beyond the mere spatial point of view when the designer intends the player to have certain emotional experience (e.g., joyful, empathetic) or debatable ideological choices challenging their beliefs and values. Within the scope of narrative perspective design for narrative-driven games, understanding *what could be involved in shaping the ideological perspective* can help game designers and authors better convey their own worldviews as well as anticipate, interpret, and even interact with players' in-game responses.

Despite the insights from previous studies related to perspective in conventional narratives and game narratives, which we will cover in the following section, how players' *ideological view* of the gameworld is influenced by a game's narrative design remains largely unknown. This paper will thus investigate the shaping of players' in-game ideological

perspective by closely analyzing two well acclaimed narrative-driven games – *Ghost of Tsushima* [32] and *Red Dead Redemption 2* [26], both with two opposite ideologies existing simultaneously for the player character to adopt. Through observing unique arrangements of narrative and ludic elements in these two test cases for ideological perspective design, the paper reveals detailed findings on ways to shape ideological perspective and prominent use of internal focalization to reinforce players' agency. The paper then discusses how the findings can contribute to a deeper understanding of how ideological perspective can be formed and shaped in single-player narrative-driven video games.

2 Previous discussion on perspective, ideology and focalization

In classic studies of narrative theory, scholars have extensively examined various narrative situations in fiction and film, covering such critical topics as different narrator's positions in fiction [7] and different types of point of view and subjectivity in film [8]. In the study of game narrative, only a small number of researchers studied how players' points of view (and, even more rarely, narrator's position) create different narrative situations in video games and how that matters [5, 33, 34]. Among them Thon's theoretical framing of narrative perspective [33] in games is relatively more complete in terms of going beyond spatial point of view and concerning ideological perspective.

2.1 The concept of perspective in narratology

In different fields, the term "perspective" is used to refer to varied phenomena. In modern narratology that is mostly situated in studies of linear narrative texts such as fiction and film, narrative perspective is one important category of concepts that studies the narrative point of view; thus, the terms "perspective" and "point of view" are often used interchangeably [28]. In a comprehensive review of the discussion of perspective in narratology, narrative theorist Niederhoff gives a broad definition: "Perspective in narrative may be defined as the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator, the characters and possibly, other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld" [19].

On another account, Schmid defines narrative perspective, or narrative point of view, as "the complex, formed by internal and external factors, of conditions for the comprehension and representation of happenings" [28]. Here the happenings form the basis of a story with an applied point of view. In this model of narrative point of view, Schmid further differentiates narrative point of view – for literary work – using five parameters: space, ideology, time, language, and perception. Among these, spatial, ideological and perceptual points of view are what we consider most relevant to game narratives. According to Schmid, *spatial point of view* is "constituted by the location from which the happenings are perceived, with the restrictions of the field of vision that result from this standpoint" [28] *Ideological point of view* "encompasses various factors that determine the subjective relationship of the observer to an occurrence: knowledge, way of thinking, evaluative position and intellectual horizons. Depending on these factors, observers will each focus on different components of the happenings and construct differing stories as a result." Lastly, *perceptual point of view* answers such questions as "through whose eyes does the narrator look at the world" or "who is responsible for the selection of these, and not other, elements of the happenings for use in the story" [28]. In the following discussion of perspective in games, we will recontextualize these three parameters in interactive game narratives.

2.2 The concept of perspective in games

In the professional field of game design, perspective is a term used to denote a wide range of phenomena. The most common usage of the term perspective is to describe the camera's point of view in video games as part of the user interface design. Adams [2] classifies the camera perspective in games into three types: first-person perspective, third-person perspective, and aerial perspectives, which can involve varied camera positions such as top-down, isometric, free-roaming or context-sensitive. For avatar-based games, where the player is visually represented by a single character or entity in the gameworld, it is important to distinguish the camera's point of view from the player-avatar's point of view since the relation between these two views influences the subjectivity of the player's perception; in other words, how much she feels she *is* the avatar character.

In game studies, several scholars have provided insights into perspective from a multitude of lenses including design, play, and interpretation of games. These lenses blend in concepts from narrative theory and rhetoric, such as narrator, narrative voice, as well as focalization [3, 4, 20]. Among the scholars, Sharp [29] provides arguably the most inclusive, or broadest, definition of perspective in the context of video games that encompasses five dimensions—"a means of constructing images with the illusion of dimensionality; a set of literary conventions relating to the point of view from which stories are told; the visual perspective from which players see a game; a player's perspective for seeing and interfacing with a game; and to the rhetorical perspective embedded in a game's design." Sharp refers to the above five forms of perspective as, respectively, *linear perspective*, *narrative perspective*, *view perspective*, *player perspective* and *rhetorical perspective*. This typology of game perspective helps distinguish some of the common usages of the term "perspective" in discussing game design and game narrative related topics. In this typology, we are particularly interested in *narrative perspective* and how game storytelling can shape the player's in-game ideological view of the gameworld.

2.3 Approaches to narrative perspective in games

In building a transmedial narratology and influenced by Neitzel's (cf. [33]) early proposal of the concept of *point of action* in games and Schmid's model of narrative point of view mentioned above, Thon proposes three dimensions to identify different perspectives in games: *spatial*, *actional* and *ideological*. The spatial perspective in Thon's terms is identical to the conventional game design concept of "perspective" as introduced earlier in section 2.2. That is, the *spatial perspective*, determined by "the spatial position from which the game space is presented audiovisually," is constructed by the relative positioning of the camera's and the player-avatar's points of view [33]. This in turn shapes the level of subjectivity in the player's experience: it is most subjective when the two views overlap (as in first-person games) and less so when the camera view does not overlap with or does not at all meet the avatar's view. This level of subjectivity is also influenced by players' *point of action*, or *actional perspective*: it is most subjective when the player's action position overlaps with the avatar's position and less so when the player interacts with the gameworld not, or not entirely, through the avatar. Lastly, and self-admittedly by Thon, the most difficult dimension to identify and describe in his model is the *ideological perspective* determined by players' *point of evaluation*. That is, the player will form her own cognitive perspective and evaluate the in-game situation based on either the avatar character's (if the player chooses to put herself into the player character's shoes) or the player's own worldview and value system. The discussion of the ideological dimension of Thon's model is still rough and not currently operational.

As described above, Thon uses subjectivity as an instrument to discern different arrangements of point of view (spatial) and point of action. However, he admitted that subjectivity could not claim too much for players' psychological experience of a game. For example, Thon questioned the claim that a subjective point of view would lead the player to have a stronger feeling of immersion in the game. Therefore, instead of using the instrument of subjectivity again, he believed it would be more sensible to identify whether the point of evaluation is from character(s), the player, or the game designer in order to distinguish various types of the ideological perspective.

Niederhoff [19] reminds us that perspective is "a complex and controversial concept." He suggests two important considerations for analyzing perspective. First, it is important to "indicate not only a point or position from which the events are viewed, but also the kind of mind located at this position and the kind of 'privilege' this mind enjoys." This consideration resonates with our goal of expanding the concept of perspective in games to encompass the varied ideological perspectives, which is the "point of evaluation" in Thon's term above.

2.4 Narrative perspective through focalization

But what exactly is the "privilege" that is at the mind's disposal, and how does it affect one's perspective? Niederhoff's contention resonates strongly with Genette's concept of focalization [12], which focuses on the linkage between one's private knowledge and the restricted narrative information that is presented to the audience. As a core concept in Narratology, Genette's *focalization* draws a distinction between those who see and those who tell the story – as opposed to the over general concept of "perspective." Genette contends that there are three layers of focalization: (1) Internal focalization refers to the inner feelings of a certain character, and thus are only accessible through his or her

minds; (2) External focalization relies on the external observations of the characters, and is not able to offer a glimpse into their private thoughts; and (3) Zero focalization taps more into the definition of an omniscient narrator (i.e., a God like position) who holds all the information of the narrative.

The concept of focalization was then later transformed by Bal, who urges to focus more on the relationship between the "vision" – the active agent that sees, and that which is seen [6]. In his appropriation of focalization in games – one of the earlier works that studied focalization in games, Nitsche [20, 21] argues that Bal's version of focalization fits better into the analysis of video games with its visual nature, since Genette's original version is based on literary texts. In a more recent work solely dedicated to focalization in games, Allison studies in detail how internal focalization works in games through a focused analysis of six games of varied genres, some of which are not narrative-driven [3]. Adopting Genette's definition of focalization for the benefit of emphasizing the selection and presentation of information, he identifies sets of strategies to create internal focalization: "audiovisual presentation, provision and restriction of private knowledge, and ludic affordances." The focus of our analysis overlaps notably with Allison's study.

3 Method

3.1 The theoretical lenses through which ideology and ideological perspective are described in the analysis

While the notion of ideology can vary a lot in different discourses, such as political science and psychoanalysis [13], within the scope of our study we follow the general take on ideology in narratology – or ideology in narrative – and focus on its thematic contribution to the game narrative and character development. In the context of narrative fiction, Herman and Vervaeck give a clear explication of the concept of *ideology* that we find also much operable in game narrative analysis:

> "ideology may be defined as the frame of values informing the narrative. This frame installs hierarchical relationships between pairs of oppositional terms such as real vs. false, good vs. bad, and beautiful vs. ugly. These preferences may be explicitly stated in the text or remain more or less implicit. The reader can engage with the frame in variety of ways: he or she can make it explicit (and thus engage with the hierarchy discovered in the text), construct it only partially, or disregard it completely. It is always the reader who pieces together the ideology of the fiction at hand, but relevant choices invariably emerge from an interaction between three elements: reader, context and text." [14]

Bal also contends that *ideological oppositions* can "occur in many, if not in all fabulas" and are always related to how actors "deal with the ideological oppositions of the world in which they move", which itself can serve as a thematic centre [6]. In our analysis of the two games, ideological opposition is explicitly at the thematic centre, providing room for players to "piece together" the ideology of the game narrative.

In Thon's review [33] of *ideological perspective*, he draws upon Chatman's and Smith's discussion of fiction and film narrative. Thon relates ideological perspective to Chatman's idea of conceptual point of view, which refers to "a character's worldview." This worldview (or ideology) provides a position from which events are evaluated. In particular, such a point of view "is...ideological situation or practical life orientation to which narrative events stand in relation" [11]. Thon also relates ideological perspective to Smith's notes of moral structures. Smith argues that to understand the film narrative, it is crucial to uncover how the moral structures are formed, to identify their possible number of types; and most importantly, to examine the different ways "in which a narration may unfurl these moral structures over time" [30]. Echoing these viewpoints originated in fiction and film but highly adaptable to games, we believe that the ideological perspective(s) within a game narrative is constructed over time along the narrative progression and influences how players comprehend and evaluate narrative events.

Before examining how the worldviews are established, clashed, and transitioned during different moments in both games, however, we must first look into the means through which the ideologies are transmitted to the players. Smith's earlier contention on the construction of ideological perspective speaks to the necessary involvement of "narration" for its conveyance in films [30]. However, as Thon has also noted, it is often difficult to locate a "narrator perspective' in video games. Information about the "fictional worlds" and "mental act" of characters, instead, are

conveyed through "cut scenes or other narrative techniques" [33]. Nünning contends that the notion of perspective can be understood through the "fictional individuals that populate the represented universe." He further asserts that "each verbal utterance and each physical or mental act of a character provides insights into his or her perspective" [22].

The worldviews and ideologies in game narratives, in this sense, can be transmitted through players' examinations of the characters' minds and behaviors rather than relying on an assumed and yet absent narrator. Further, how players examine characters' minds in the audio-visually represented gameworld can be heavily influenced by the style of focalization, as discussed in the earlier review of previous work. Since "[c]haracter…is the most integral factor in establishing the spectator's moral perspective on the action" [10], Genette's concept of focalization would be of particular relevance here in offering players a glimpse into the characters' minds and, naturally, their worldviews.

It is worth noting that ideological perspective is very hard to discern, as Schmid argues, because ideology is at the same time conflates with other dimensions of perspective. However, as he also argues, ideology can also "appear independent of other facets, in the form of direct, explicit evaluation" [28]. It is thus important for us to pay attention in our game analysis to situations with explicit evaluation independent of other factors and those with implicit evaluation that are determined by players' input as well as the spatial and actional point of views.

3.2 Goal and scope of the analysis

The main goal of this paper is to investigate how ideological perspectives in games are constructed and transmitted to the players. While "the fictional world" is normally conveyed through the narrative, as Thon has reminded, the worldviews and characters' mentality are also presented through ludic elements [33]. Therefore, we focus on narrative-driven games – i.e., games that integrates narration tightly into gameplay – and conduct a close analysis into the games' narrative contents and players' experience with the fictional gameworld during gameplay. Our initial game screening covered some of the well-known narrative games (e.g., *Detroit: Become Humans* [23], *Heavy Rain* [24], *Grand Theft Auto V* [25]) that, through multi-player-character gameplay, explicitly convey various ideologies, each carried through a distinct player character in the narratives. However, through our first-handed playthrough and watching online game walkthroughs, it became apparent that many of those games rely much on developers' tight control of game mechanics, which help reinforce a singular ideology imposed into the character design. These games seldom take players' free play into account and do not speak much from their angle, given players' moments of choices have already been meticulously calculated. As a result, our interest in knowing players' active involvement in ideological choices would not be addressed enough. Upon examining different open-world games with more room for free play and more customized options of play styles, we arrived at *Ghost of Tsushima* (hereafter Ghost) and *Red Dead Redemption 2* (hereafter RDR 2).

Ghost and RDR2 are both critically acclaimed titles that have been published recently (i.e., in 2020 and 2018 respectively). Not only can they provide an up-to-date demonstration of how ideological perspectives can be constructed in open-world games, they also allow players to oscillate between two sets of conflicting ideologies through a single protagonist across the entire game. Serving as a tribute towards Akira Kurosawa's seminal samurai film series, Ghost offers an "authentic" samurai gameplay. The plot follows the samurai Jin Sakai along his quest to reclaim the island of Tsushima from Mongolian invasion, throughout which he must undergo the identity crisis between an honourable samurai and one who would give up samurai traditions to save Tsushima. On the other hand, in RDR2 the player accompanies Arthur Morgan through his journey of outlaw and decides whether he would gain his redemption upon contacting tuberculosis, which is a fatal disease at that time.

Apart from providing the player with much freedom in "playing" between the opposite worldviews, these two games also feature a heavily stylized presentation of narrative contents – through varied ways of focalization – during players' free exploration of the open world. This particular use of gameplay activities serving as narrative devices, as we will discuss later, demonstrates a unique approach to constructing ideological perspectives on an ongoing basis which can seldom be seen in games that celebrate a high level of player's roaming freedom.

The scope of our investigation of ideology, in this paper, is outlined by the above theoretical lenses and is limited to the possible ideologies that the player assumes or adopts *for* the player character. Our investigation also looks at the

ideologies that the game designer conveys or imposes into the gameworld. In other words, all our mentions of ideology in the analysis are *in-game* ideologies, similar to narratological discussion of ideology *in* narrative.

4 Analysis of ideological perspective design in two games

4.1 The set-up of opposite ideologies

In our close analysis of Ghost of Tsushima (Ghost) and Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2), four main groups of ideologies (I1 and I2 respectively) have been identified and categorized in the table below.

Table 1 Opposite ideologies pre-established in *Ghost of Tsushima* and *Red Dead Redemption 2*

Ghost of Tsushima (Ghost)		**Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2)**	
I1-G: Samurai	**I2-G: Ghost**	**I1-R: Outlaw**	**I2-R: Honor**
– Tradition, Honour, Control of Emotions – Filial piety (as a "son") – Demonstrating leadership as a lord	– Abandoning Samurai's code – Being practical (assassination & stealing)	– Loyal (to the leader and gang – Against civilization – Violent and Greedy	– Redemptive – Being a "good Samaritan" – Making up for past sins

While the number of ideologies assumed by players in playing Ghost or RDR2 can certainly surpass two, they can still be generally classified under I1-G Tradition and I2-G Ghost, or I1-R Outlaw and I2-R Honor. The two ideologies in each of the two games remain the central (albeit conflicting) bodies of beliefs and values throughout the two games, with the numbers 1 and 2 indicating the order of their emergences in the narratives. The two I1s refer to the already established worldviews that the protagonists of the two games (Jin and Arthur respectively) initially uphold at the beginning of their stories, whereas the two I2s are the opposite worldviews that later emerge as the situations take an unpleasant turn.

4.2 The exposition: Establishing the first worldviews/ideologies (I1)

At the beginnings of both Ghost and RDR2, cut scenes narrate from a third-person, detached point of view – a means of external focalization – are heavily employed to provide a general story background to players. In Ghost, the plot unfolds as Jin Sakai, one of the samurais in Tsushima, accompanies his uncle Lord Shimura to face thousands of Mongolian invaders with only eighty comrades. Despite being hugely outnumbered, Lord Shimura fiercely proclaims: "We will face death and defend our home. Tradition, Courage, Honor. They are what make us. We are Samurai!" With only a few sentences, the player is already informed that these attributes constitute the doctrine of belief that Jin, his uncle Shimura, and their fellows uphold, and that their worldview and self-identities are purely constructed by honor and tradition. Similarly, at the beginning of RDR2, Arthur Morgan, as the right-hand man in the Dutch van der Linde gang, is seen scouting ahead as the gang struggles for survival on a snow mountain after a failed heist. Upon reaching a shelter, Dutch (the leader) delivers a speech of encouragement – with the recent deaths of gang members and harsh situation in a cut scene, telling the members: "If I could throw myself in their ground in their stead… I would do it, gladly… Stay strong. Stay with me!" Again, with only a few lines, Dutch informs the players of how the gang members should always prioritize the well-being of the gang above personal interests, and, above all, to follow the lead of Dutch unconditionally.

As demonstrated above, Lord Shimura and Dutch act both as leaders and as the embodiments of the two already established worldviews and identities – honorable samurai and loyal outlaw. It is crucial to introduce them at the beginning of the games as they show players not only the pre-established ideologies but also the sets of moral values that Jin and Arthur uphold at the beginning with their bonding with their leaders. After the introductory cut scene, however, their loyalty towards their leaders can be observed seen via internal focalization with various means of self-expressions, such as journaling. In RDR2, Arthur always carries a journal with him, which is updated regularly upon

his completion of missions and encounters with NPCs. Through reading the hand-written journal, players gain immediate access to his inner feelings that are rarely revealed in the mission cut scenes or during the action sequences. Early on, players could observe his tone of admiration and total acceptance of Dutch's vision in his written reflections: "Dutch being Dutch, his plans involve robbery and dreams."

Likewise, in the early game, once Jin retrieves his clan Katana, a childhood flashback with Lord Shimura – an internal focalization - will be immediately triggered. Within the flashback, little Jin obediently recites the code of samurai to his uncle Lord Shimura, who afterwards comments that "I struggle with it every day." Interestingly, although the difficulty in maintaining the samurai code is first stressed by Lord Shimura, it is Jin who suffers from it continuously. This particular memory recollection, in this sense, prepares the player for experiencing Jin's inner turbulence that emerges later in the story.

4.3 The complication: Introducing opposite worldviews/ideologies (I2)

The initially deep-rooted worldviews of both protagonists are soon faced with challenges, conveyed in the two games with heavy usage of internal focalization. With the massacre of the samurais by the Mongolians, Jin is saved by a female warrior, Yuna, who he soon realizes is a thief as she urges him to scavenge civilians' homes for supplies. After an initial rejection of the idea, Jin ultimately submits due to the desperate need of resources. Yuna's role as a carrier of the opposite ideology – against the "honorable samurai" one – becomes increasingly apparent as she persuades Jin to assassinate Mongolian invaders considering their overwhelming number. While first insisting assassination is "without honor, I will not break my code" to Yuna, who responds with "then bend it", Jin eventually walks on the path of the "ghost" yielding to practical needs. Similarly, as Arthur contracts tuberculous, he starts to question his unconditional loyalty to Dutch, given his brutal plans. In one of the cut scenes on a side mission, Arthur confesses to a nun that "I am dying, sister. I got TB. I have lived a bad life." Later on a main mission, Arthur even urges John (another gang member) to leave the gang with his family. As John asks "But what about loyalty [towards Dutch and the gang]?" Arthur responds with "Loyal to what matters."

While the above instances are all presented in third person cut scenes or gameplay of the main missions, the sense of their inner confusions and acceptance of the later ideologies (I2) becomes stronger through internal focalization. As Jin is forced to perform assassinations on a main mission for the first time, or does it under the player's will later on, another flashback of his childhood memory will immediately surface. In the flashback, Lord Shimura solemnly reminds Jin that "We (Samurai) look them (enemies) in the eye with courage. Only cowards strike from the shadows." Likewise, in Arthur's reflection on his relationship with Dutch and Hosea (another leader), he writes in his journal that "I love Dutch like a father, but in many ways, I love Hosea even more. He is kind and loving like a human being. Dutch is something else."

4.4 The conflict: Reinforcing the opposite ideology through ludic affordances (I1<I2)

After presenting many of the protagonists' mental acts during the introduction of a second, opposite ideology, both games provide more ludic affordances to reinforce it. Just like what Thon takes note, while "most of the information about mental acts of characters in a computer game will be conveyed through cut scenes and other forms of narrative techniques, the main part of physical acts will be presented in the form of ludic instead of narrative events" [33]. The gameplay experience of the two games is not totally free but guided. As both Ghost and RDR2 try to urge the player to follow the paths leading to the opposite, more attractive ideologies, more opportunities and incentives would be created for players to take the paths of the "ghost" as Jin and redemption as Arthur. In the later part of RDR2's main story, for instance, Arthur will be offered the option to decide whether to save a Native American, as well as whether to help a widow in a side quest. While turning them down would only affect the ending in an insignificant way, the "real cost" comes from missing an exciting fight mission and several subsequent side quests "assigned" by the widow. In other words, being an honorable Arthur would allow the player to experience more gameplay content. The advantage of being a good Samaritan can also be observed from Arthur's encounters with NPCs. If Arthur helps the passersby that are in need, sometimes he would be rewarded with free equipment, which can be expensive if by

purchase and particularly useful during early game. On the contrary, role-playing as an evil Arthur will result in a much more inconvenient gameplay, since breaking the law would lead to his constant confrontations with the law reinforcements in the open world – unless the bounty has already been taken care of.

The approach of creating incentives that fulfill "practical gameplay needs" is even more explicit in Ghost. While it has no problem for players to play Jin in an honorable samurai playstyle – facing enemies up front without assassinations – in the first half of the game (except certain main quests), it will soon become apparent that playing as the "ghost" will lead to a more manageable gameplay. This is especially the case when Jin is overwhelmed by enemies, where the use of ghost weapons is almost inevitable (even more so when playing with a higher difficulty). In a similar logic, following Yuna's suggestion of stealing supplies is essential to upgrading Jin's equipment, which is critical to his survival. The design of ludic elements, in this sense, nudges the player – with such incentives as additional gameplay content or special rewards – to adopt the opposite ideology (I2) even outside of the main quests.

4.5 Alternative instantiations as player-enacted ideology

Thanks to the two ideologies at work simultaneously, even when players stray away from the pathways under I2 that are reinforced with ludic affordances, they can still forge their own desired path in their playthroughs by oscillating along the continuum with I1 and I2 at the two poles, which is aided by alternative gameplay mechanics. In Ghost, despite the overwhelming power of the Ghost Stance (a status which allows Jin to kill each of his enemies with one strike when he is wearing the Ghost armor), fighting like an honorable samurai would not necessarily be much inferior than fighting like a ghost. In fact, early on in the game, the player is introduced with stand-off strikes, which allow Jin to kill off enemies with also one swing but only upon right timing. Similarly, the freedom in choosing his armour types also provides huge flexibilities to his fighting style. Even the most iconic Ghost armour does not forces the player to assassinate the enemies – although it would be much easier – in order to reach the Ghost Stance. To a certain extent then, there is still much freedom in how the player forms the protagonist's identity – be it an honourable samurai or a ghost – through deciding Jin's fighting style provided by the gameplay mechanics. A similar pattern can also be found in RDR2, in which playing a "bad guy" can even lead to a more desirable outcome. In one of the treasure hunt missions, Arthur can choose to tie up or kill the merchant in order to steal his treasure map (as well as other valuable belongings) rather than spending his limited money to buy it. What is worth noting is that these "practical gameplay" differences in both games are rather vague and not dominant enough to coerce the player into a certain pathway (I2).

5 Discussion

5.1 Ideology/Identity as performance

Ryan points out that "events in fictional worlds are connected to certain goals, plans and psychological motivations" [27]. The two sets of opposing worldviews (I1 and I2) in Ghost and RDR2, thus, can function as a means of psychological self-orientation for the player. In particular, Thon contends that: "The different points of evaluation and ideological perspectives of the characters in a computer game result in a certain system of norms and values in which the player has to position him- or herself" [33].

What the game designers prefer, as in the cases of Ghost and RDR2, is no longer as dominating as what we normally see in other games. Instead, psychological motivations of the protagonist and sets of norms and values of the gameworld are contingent upon players' interpretations of the narrative and their subsequently assumed identity, as manifested in their *chosen* playstyles in the two games. A player who insists on adopting the identity of a samurai would certainly refrain Jin from using ghost weapons and assassinations, whereas playing an outlaw Arthur means his behaviour would not be as caring as that of a redemptive Arthur. In Vella's [34] discussion on ludic subjectivity, he asserts that: "This sense of what can be done or not contributes not just to the construction of 'I', but also to the ideological perspective of what can or cannot be done from the player character's perspective." In the case of our two games with opposite ideologies, what can or cannot be done is decided solely by the player. At the same time, to follow a particular ideology or a worldview also means the player slips into a specific identity *for* the player character.

This identity is built on a series of performative acts that are in coherence with the chosen identity. In this light, we can draw an analogy in Butler's famous essay on gender construction, where she contends that gender is essentially constructed by performances, rather than based on biological characteristics [9]. A boy would be expected to play with robots, while girls would play with barbies. These performative "acts," define and construct their own perceived gender and identities. Similarly, the identities that the protagonists carry in Ghost and RDR2 are also defined and constructed by their performances throughout the games, which can be seen in Jin's fighting style as well as Arthur's manners towards other characters.

5.2 Agency through focalization

For players, the sense of identity of a character and its associated worldview can hardly form without a high degree of agency throughout the gameplay. Agency is achieved not just from the freedom of choosing which fighting style to adopt, which clothes to don, and which NPCs to help or kill, but also from varied forms of focalization. Mateas and Stern have classified two types of agency – local and global. In particular, local agency arises when "the player's actions cause immediate, context specific, meaningful reactions from the system" [17]. In RDR2, Arthur would often be greeted with different feedback – favorable or vice versa – from the NPCs, based on how he has treated them, which is a design quite a few narrative-driven games (e.g., the *Fable* series) have. RDR2 takes the feedback idea even further by having an honour bar in the game HUD that is updated in accordance to what Arthur has done. Unlike the responses from NPCs' feedback presented in external focalization, the honour bar can be seen as a way of internal focalization since it represents how Arthur perceives his current honour status. Another means of internal focalization emerges in separate intervals, during which Arthur is at the verge of dying and sees different reflections of his honour status via a cut scene – a buck at dawn (warm color tone) when the honor is high and a wolf at midnight (cool color tone) when the honor is low. Through these ways of internal focalization, implemented through audiovisual presentation as referred in Allison's framework [3], the player is reminded of how far or near Arthur is from his redemption.

In a closely related thread, Kway and Mitchell have argued that a sense of emotional agency can be achieved through local agency: "When the characters provide meaningful and expressive responses to the choices made, the player can better grasp the type of character that he or she is shaping" [16]. While examples cited by Kway and Mitchell are heavily based on the combinations of dialogues that are available and thus rely on the feedbacks from the NPCs, a similar form of emotional agency can be achieved through Jin's own monologue – again, a way of internal focalization. As Jin wanders around the open world, he will frequent different onsens and spots for haiku.[1] As he reflects on different characters and situations in those places, the player would be given the "freedom" to choose the combination of the poems, as well as whom to mourn in his reflections. Similar to Kway and Mitchell's examples, although the options in those moments are already scripted and do little to affect the general game and plot progression, they are meaningful to the player in the construction of the identify and ideology of the player character. If Jin chooses to mourn Yuriko in the onsen right after the mission she dies, for instance, the act will reflect on how strong the bonding between Jin and Yuriko is. Even in moment-by-moment action sequences, when the player makes Jin to assassinate enemies in the open-world, he would occasionally mutter "This is how we win" or "This is the only way" to justify his samurai code-breaking fighting style. By responding to the player's chosen actions in a meaningful way, the game offers a way to self-reconcile – especially if Jin has been on a path of a samurai – and to maintain the agency.

5.3 Global agency and ludonarrative dissonance

Mateas and Stern [17] describe global agency is achieved "when the global shape of the experience is determined by player action," and that the player understands how the particulars of the narrative arc lead to a specific ending. For Kway and Mitchell's game examples [16], despite a high degree of emotional agency found at the local level, the

[1] Onsen (hot springs) and Haiku are venues that offer Jin a chance to rest his soul and prepare his physicality amidst the war. Through slipping into an onsen, Jin can choose which person or events that he has recently encountered to reflect on. Haiku offers another form of reflection over the narrative themes through different combinations of poems upon player's choices. Since they are meant to be poetic, they are not as informative and specific as Onsen, but offers the player more room of imagination over Jin's struggle.

authors claim those games fail to achieve global agency because the narrative is linear. Notwithstanding, the narrative structures of Ghost and RDR2 are also linear at the global level, but we argue they both achieve a high degree of global agency thanks to the design that ties ideology into player choices. No matter what the player has chosen along the game's journey, Jin will still be exiled by the Shogun, whereas Arthur will still die of tuberculosis. Before their ultimate endings, however, the player will be offered a chance to choose how Arthur will die (violently or peacefully) and whether Jin will kill his uncle (a path of honor or ghost). The player now will make their one last *ideological* choice that tends to be consistent with her previous choices during earlier moment-by-moment gameplay. This last act is instrumental to achieve a sense of global agency, despite the fact that the game narrative is linear and the ultimate resolution is fixed. A player's comment towards the ending choice of *Ghost* on YouTube reads as follows: "*The thing is, half of the game is being a Samurai and the other half being the Ghost. I personally played the whole game as a 'Samurai' and not the 'Ghost', and only did stealth when I had to. So for me the honouring his wish and killing him made more sense, because I still felt like a Samurai, even if the game is trying to tell me the character development of Jin is that he's no longer Samurai and just the Ghost now.*"[2]

Hocking coined the phrase "ludonarrative dissonance" to describe the situation in which what the player character does through gameplay conflicts with the themes transmitted through the narrative; or, in Hocking's words, the game throws "the narrative and ludic elements of the work into opposition" [15]. While this phrase was first used by Hocking to describe *BioShock* [1], some have also applied this phrase to explain the failure of *The Last of Us Part II* [18], in which the ending promotes a forgiving attitude while the protagonist slits her enemies' throats violently throughout the game[3]. In many senses, ludonarrative dissonance speaks to the inevitable conflict between the player's agency and the authored story. In games like *BioShock* and *The Last of Us Part II*, the dissonance is caused by the failure to build global agency. In many open-world games, where players are often offered an unnecessarily high degree of freedom to explore, the dissonance can even be seen at the local level sometimes. In *Final Fantasy XV* [31], the prince Noctis is often complained by players since he can casually fish in different ponds within the open world even when his empire is in grave danger.

Ghost and RDR2 avoid ludonarrative dissonance by achieving agency at both global and local levels, since it entails what the players have done at a local level is in coherence with the narrative at the global level. From the discussions earlier we can observe that the achievement of global agency must be tightly intertwined with how local agency is achieved and what it means to the players. In the cases of Ghost and RDR2, they have presented a clever narrative framing of identity crisis, which helps players make sense of the co-existent yet conflicting ideologies. Moreover, these worldviews are not dichotomous but in an ongoing, oscillatory relationship on the continuum, which are further strengthened with the help of internal focalization. Internal focalization is frequently used in the side activities in the open world (e.g., onsen, haiku, player characters' dialogues with NPCs) as well as in keeping an always up-to-date journal in Ghost and RDR2. It is an effective way to bridge (and remind players of) the central ideologies that echo and oscillate throughout the whole game with player's free gameplay. This is also why that, to a certain extent, the core, distinct gaming and narrative experience lies not in the outcome, but in the ongoing process that the player has taken part in the struggle of identity of the player character.

6 Conclusion

Focusing on how ideologies are performed and constructed by players within the designed perspective structure, we presented a close analysis of two comparable games, *Ghost of Tsushima* and *Red Dead Redemption 2*, which have the similar use of opposite ideologies. We have discussed in detail of how this design works both as a structure and as a technique, and the benefits it brings to players' sense of agency and the harmony between ludic and narrative elements. The two game narratives with opposite ideologies allow for a rare but precious opportunity for us to observe into how ideology is presented, perceived, comprehended, enacted, and reconciled by players in a seemingly

[2] See this player's reaction towards the end in the comments section of the gameplay video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6id1h2UEJ7s.

[3] See blog "The Last of Us 2's Combat Undermines Its Narrative": https://gamerant.com/the-last-of-us-2-combat-narrative/.

conflicting setting. The findings thus contribute to the theory of narrative perspective in games and more specifically its ideological aspect in several areas.

First, the ideological perspective can be constructed through both those design strategies that provide direct, explicit evaluation and others that allow players to procedurally make ideological choices. Earlier we referred to Schmid's point that ideological perspective can both be involved with other dimenions of perspective and exist independently in the form of "direct, explicit evaluation" [28]. In our game analysis, on the one hand, we see frequent use of internal focalization through audiovisual presentation and ludic affordances, which are conflating with dimensions of the spatial and actional perspectives in Thon's framework [33]. On the other hand, we also see moments with external focalization via a means like NPCs directly speaking to the protagonist. Here the game conveys its point of evaluation explicitly and via NPC by game designers, which is independent of not only other dimensions of the narrative perspective but also players' input.

Second, along our gameplay and analysis, we observed a good variety of ways of how internal focalization is created in the games. Narrative devices, such as the memory flashback in cut scenes and journal reading, can be added to Allison's [3] identified means of internal focalization in games.

Last but not least, examples of how agency is achieved through focalization can help deepen the understanding of how sense of agency can be highly influenced by the ideological perspective design.

The design of opposite ideologies in the two narrative-driven games allows us to uncover a network of relationships among a variety of game design strategies, narrative devices, and players' performance and construction of their characters' in-game ideologies. Our analysis shows that it is not a single device, such as focalization, that determines how players construct their ideologies. Instead, it is the constantly changing, orchestrated narrative situation as a whole that shape players' in-game ideologies and their experiences in a distinct way. Further analysis needs to be conducted in order to reach the broader goal of building a more formal understanding of how ideological perspective operates in games both in relation to and independent of other dimensions of narrative perspective.

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