



META-LUDOLOGICAL NARRATIVE IN DIGITAL GAMES: A STUDY ON ALAN WAKE II

DİJİTAL OYUNLARDA META-LUDOLOJİK ANLATI: ALAN WAKE II ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

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Abstract

This study, examining the innovative perspectives and opportunities video games offer to narratology, particularly through the game *Alan Wake II*, scrutinizes the potential of digital games to develop new narrative forms and techniques beyond traditional narrative frameworks. *Alan Wake II* stands at the convergence of meta-fiction, meta-narrative, and meta-linear cinematic narration, adding new layers of meaning to the narrative through player interactions. It expands the boundaries of storytelling by employing methods such as creating stories within stories, transitioning between characters and fictional universes. This interactive storytelling grants players the freedom to explore different layers of the story while also allowing for deep inquiries into the structure of the narrative, fictionality, and reality. The layered structure of the narrative in *Alan Wake II* and the intertextual and intermedial integration of numerous story elements emphasize the meta-linear cinematic narrative, giving the player an active role in assembling the story. Through synthesizing traditional narrative methods with the techniques used in the analysis of digital games, this study opens a discussion on how video games can form a meta-ludological narrative form. It provides a comprehensive evaluation of the contributions of the structure formed by the combination of ludic and narrative elements to narratology, demonstrating how metaleptic transitions between different fictional planes on various layers can be integrated into gameplay.

Keywords: Narratology, Digital Games, Meta-narrative, Meta-ludological Narrative.

Öz

Video oyunlarının anlatı biliminde sunduğu yenilikçi perspektifleri ve imkanları, özellikle *Alan Wake II* oyunu üzerinden inceleyen bu çalışma ile dijital oyunların geleneksel anlatı formlarının ötesine geçebilecek yeni anlatı biçimlerini ve teknikleri geliştirmekteki potansiyeli mercek altına alınmıştır. *Alan Wake II*, meta-kurgu, meta-anlatı ve meta-lineer sinematik anlatının kesiştiği noktada, oyuncuların hikâye üzerindeki etkileşimleri aracılığıyla anlatıya yeni anlam katmanlarının eklendiği bir yapı sunarken, hikâye içinde hikâye oluşturma, karakterler ve kurgusal evrenler arasında geçiş yapma gibi yöntemlerle anlatının sınırlarını genişletir. Bu etkileşimli hikâye anlatımı, oyunculara hikâyenin farklı katmanlarını keşfetme özgürlüğü verirken aynı zamanda anlatının yapısına, kurgusallığa ve gerçekliğe dair derin sorgulamalar yapma imkânı sunar. *Alan Wake II*'de anlatının katmanlı yapısı ve çok sayıda hikâye parçasının metinlerarası ve medyalararası entegrasyonu, meta-lineer sinematik anlatıyı vurgulayarak oyuncuya hikâyeyi bir araya getirme sürecinde aktif bir rol verir. Bu çalışmayla geleneksel anlatı metotları ile dijital oyunların analizinde kullanılan yöntemlerin bir sentezi aracılığıyla, video oyunlarının meta-ludolojik anlatı biçimini nasıl oluşturabileceği tartışmaya açılmıştır. Oyunun ludik ve anlatısal öğelerinin birleşiminden oluşan yapının anlatı biliminde katkılarının kapsamlı bir değerlendirilmesi sunulurken, farklı katmanlarda yer alan kurgusal düzlemler arasındaki metaleptik geçişlerin oynanış ile bütünleştirilebileceği ortaya koyulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Naratoloji, Dijital Oyun, Meta-anlatı, Meta-Ludolojik Anlatı.



INTRODUCTION

The development of media entertainment technologies, spanning a spectrum from radio to digital games, has transformed narrative forms in parallel with this evolution. The linear structure of cinema and television facilitates the presentation of a story from beginning to end to the audience, while video games have introduced more dynamic and layered narrative structures where users can interact and shape the story flow according to their preferences. The multilayered nature and the amalgamation of various art forms within digital games complicate their examination solely through the research methodologies of a single discipline. For this reason, as an academic field of study, video games have been enriched with theories developed across diverse areas such as cinema studies, literature, psychology, philosophy, ludology, and narratology, securing their place in the research and application domains of these disciplines (Bostan, 2022, s. 19). The interaction between video games and cinema represents a complex topic within media studies. The concept of cinematic games is defined by the integration of cinema's aesthetic and technical elements into video games, a process that also brings the challenge of directly applying film theories to this medium due to the unique dynamics of video games (King & Krzywinska, 2002, s. 143). On the other hand, the fields of video games and cinema have drawn closer through the popularization of cinematic narrative forms in video games, the participation of well-known figures from the silver screen within the medium, and the involvement of film directors in the development processes. As a result, video games have expanded their capacity to offer cinematic depth and narrative-based experiences, dispelling existing prejudices about the insufficiency of this interactive new form of expression. With this evolving cinematic aspect, video games have become a space open to intermedial interaction, evolving into a medium capable of accommodating various genres and forms of expression (Meskin & Robson, 2010; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011). Within this evolutionary process, video game studies and the field of cinema have found many common grounds in terms of narrative density and diversity.

Similar to the narrative evolution in cinema, video games now offer interactive narrative models that challenge the boundaries of their own medium. The interactive nature of digital games, providing users with freedom of choice and the potential to contain multilayered story structures, has sparked new debates and theoretical approaches in narrative studies. Game designers continue to seek new ways to create dynamic and flexible narrative structures that transform how players experience, perceive, and interact with stories. Ultimately, video games have evolved to a point where players' decisions and actions can significantly alter the course and outcome of the story. This transformation allows the narrative to be perceived as a unique and personalized structure by individuals experiencing the game, enabling the emergence of new perspectives within narratology. Games like *Alan Wake II* demonstrate that video games can possess a meta-narrative that not only tells traditional stories but also questions its structure and medium. In this context, video games should be considered an evolving media form that necessitates a reevaluation of narrative techniques and theories.

This study, tracing meta-narratives in the realm of video games with a focus on *Alan Wake II*, examines the game within the framework of concepts related to narratology and discusses the new possibilities that video games offer for narratological studies. Accordingly, the relationship between digital games and narrative was initially explored, followed by an examination of concepts related to meta-narrative, such as meta-fiction, self-reflection, self-awareness, metalepsis, and meta-cinematic narrative, and their various applications. Due to the intersection of the concept of meta-linear cinematic narrative, as proposed by Brooks (1999), with the concept of meta-narrative specifically in *Alan Wake II*, these phenomena were examined separately to identify their reflections within the game and to contemplate the possibility of a new form of meta-narrative unique to the video game medium.

The methodological framework of this study is established on the basis of a ludonarrative-focused approach that combines unique methodologies used in the analysis of semiotic, visual-auditory, and interactive narratives, in addition to narrative-centered methods as proposed by Núñez and Remesal (2021). This synthesis, which brings together methods used in the analysis of digital games and paradigms proposed from traditional narrative methods, demonstrates that games with complex narratives like *Alan Wake II* can be analyzed within the context of approaches emerging in the fields of digital games and new media, in addition to narratology. Koenitz's (2015) work on interactive narrative

analysis forms an essential part of this multidimensional methodological framework. This framework addresses the problem that traditional narrative theories do not fully encompass the uniqueness of the digital environment and provides the necessary tools to analyze the specific dynamics of interactive digital narratives such as digital games, which include user interaction and narrative design elements. In this direction, in addition to the story, all elements supporting the narrative related to gameplay, visuals, and interface have been considered up to the section containing the game's analysis, within the framework of concepts that are part of the study area of narratology. While tracing the traces of meta-narrative and meta-fiction within game design, the reflections of meta-linear cinematic narrative have also been revealed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIDEO GAMES AND NARRATIVE

The academic examination of video games divides into two fundamental disciplines that each focus on different aspects of the gaming experience: ludology and narratology. Ludology investigates video games as a mechanism of play and interaction, emphasizing the player's actions, game mechanics, and rules, while narratology considers video games as storytelling tools, highlighting how narrative plays a central role in the player's experience. Gameplay refers to the actions taken by the player to achieve in-game objectives, whereas narrative serves as the transmitter of events within the game's fictional universe (Lindley, 2002, s. 204). This distinction between ludology and narratology creates a fundamental dichotomy in the study of video games. Ludologists argue that the essence of video games lies in the challenges faced by the player and the methods to overcome these challenges, while narratologists claim that the stories and characters presented by video games enrich the gaming experience and strengthen the connection between the player and the game world (Kokonis, 2014).

In the ongoing debate about digital games' focus on narrative, industry figures like Aarseth (1997) and Juul (1998) argue that video games' multidimensional nature transcends just narrative elements, offering a broader perspective. Jenkins (2004) highlights that video games develop unique narrative properties, such as environmental storytelling, positioning them as a privileged narrative form. This points to the dynamic interaction between player exploration and narrative elements within game spaces, affecting both game mechanics and story. The three-layered narrative model by Carlquist (2003) and the ludus versus paidea distinction by Frasca (2003) shed light on the complex structure of video games, showing they encompass not only rules and interactions but also rich narrative worlds for an in-depth narrative experience.

The interplay between narrative and gameplay is vital in understanding and evaluating video games. Games that weave their narratives and rules together aim to provide a unique, participatory experience (Martín-Núñez & Navarro-Remesal, 2021, s. 17). However, when narrative and mechanics are misaligned, it leads to “*ludonarrative dissonance*” detracting from the game experience by creating inconsistencies between the player's actions and the ongoing story (Hocking, 2007). Therefore, integrating ludological and narratological aspects throughout the development and analysis phases of video games will foster a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic medium.

The inherent narrative and ludological essence of digital games enable a gaming experience that is much more layered and interactive compared to the experiences of watching or reading. Leveraging algorithms, digital games complicate story structures, engaging players in the narrative process, as Mittel (2006) suggests. Early text-based adventure games like *Colossal Cave Adventure* blurred the lines between gaming and narrative, engaging players directly in the story. Over time, video games have inspired modern visual-auditory media strategies, contributing to the evolution of narrative forms (Martín-Núñez & Navarro-Remesal, 2021, s. 14). Currently, games like *Baldur's Gate 3*, *Disco Elysium*, and *Elden Ring*, alongside meta-fictional works like *Alan Wake II*, continue to push narrative boundaries, blending fictional worlds across various layers through gameplay mechanics and setting the stage for a broader discussion on meta-fiction, meta-narrative, and meta-linear cinematic narrative.

Video Games as the Intersection of Meta-Fiction, Meta-Narrative, and Meta-Linear Cinematic Narrative

The concepts of meta-narrative and meta-fiction are intertwined, often used interchangeably, yet with crucial distinctions. Neuman and Nünning (2015) clarify these distinctions, categorizing self-reflection as a broader term that encompasses both. Meta-narrative, which reflects on its own creation and engages the audience in the artistic and creative process, creates a layer of self-awareness about the narrative's construction and the narrator's thoughts and interpretations (Munson, 2001, s. 21). Meta-fiction, in contrast, focuses on the work's fictional nature and structure, including its self-referential aspects, narratives within narratives, and characters' awareness of their fictional existence (Neumann & Nünning, 2015, s. 344).

Self-reflection and self-awareness are pivotal in literature and visual arts, highlighted by references within the work to itself and its creator. This not only emphasizes the work's artificiality but also encourages the audience to engage with the underlying meanings and structures. Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and the visual works of Salvador Dalí and Duchamp serve as exemplars of self-reflection, while cinema offers instances through direct inclusion of the director's voice or thoughts conveyed by characters (Kovacs, 2007; Escribano, 2018; Khanh, 2020). Films like *The Truman Show* and *The Edge of Heaven* use characters and narrative techniques to blur the lines between reality and fiction, showcasing meta-narrative elements. On the other hand, situations where characters directly address the audience or are aware of their own fictional existence break the fourth wall. Productions like *The Truman Show* question the boundaries between reality and fiction, while films like *The Edge of Heaven* display a cinematic example of self-reflection through characters reflecting the director's mindset, offering an instance of meta-narrative (Önal, 2010, s. 43). In examples such as *Inception*, *Cloud Atlas*, and *The Matrix Resurrections*, metalepsis serves as the foundational element of meta-narrative.

Metalepsis, explored by Genette (1980) and expanded upon by narratologists like Wolf (2005), represents a narrative leap across different fictional or reality levels. This technique violates the boundaries between narrative levels, offering a creative tool that enriches the narrative's impact and engages the audience more deeply. It finds extensive application in genres like fantasy and horror, where it enhances the story's magical elements and reinforces the illusion of reality, thereby deepening audience immersion (Klimmek, 2009; Bhadury, 2013; Fuchs, 2013). Through these techniques, narratives and media invite deeper reflection on their construction and consumption, underscoring metalepsis's role in modern narratology and its potential to disrupt and enrich narrative experiences. Thus, metalepsis emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon in narrative and media studies.

Ryan (2006) considers metalepsis in two dimensions: rhetorical metalepsis and ontological metalepsis. Rhetorical metalepsis allows for brief excursions through temporary gaps between levels but typically does not involve communication between the author's characters within the fictional universe. In ontological metalepsis, fictional worlds across different levels can interweave, and figures within these planes can interact. This can manifest in ways such as characters in a narrative organizing to kill their author, as seen in *Alan Wake II*, exemplifying the profound impact and diverse manifestations of metalepsis in narrative structures.

Fludernik (2003) builds on Genette's propositions to identify four dimensions of metalepsis. The first dimension, termed authorial metalepsis, features the author emerging as the narrator of the story. The second form of metalepsis involves the interaction between different fictional levels within the narrative and the effects of this interaction on the narrative. In this case, the narrator steps into another, deeper diegetic level within the story, or a character transfers themselves to a more internal level of the story (Pier, 2016, s. 331). The use of this technique in postmodern works encourages deep reflection on how narratives are structured, how fictional worlds are interconnected, and the reader's perceptions and interpretations in the face of this structural complexity (Dervişcemaloğlu, 2019, s. 146). This approach demonstrates the ability to navigate within the narrative structure, showing how narrative universes can interlace and how these transitions can contribute to the overall work. The third dimension involves a fictional reader within the story or positions the protagonist as a reader within a broader narrative discourse, blurring the lines between narrative layers and reevaluating character-reader relationships.

This ontological metalepsis, as Ryan (2006) terms it, or narrative and reader metalepsis in Fludernik's (2003) classification, enriches the narrative by reflecting on the roles of characters and real readers within the story. Lastly, the fourth type, rhetorical metalepsis, manipulates narrative time, fostering a seamless blend of reality and fiction. It often employs narrative pauses for background exposition, allowing the narrator to momentarily enter the reader's realm, thereby merging narrative and reality (Pier, 2016, s. 331). This dimension emphasizes the intricate interplay between the narrator and reader, adding depth to the narrative structure.

One conceptual tool used alongside metalepsis to examine the layered structure and intertwined elements of narratives and artworks is *mise en abyme* (Derviřcemalođlu, 2019). This phenomenon, characterized by the presence of smaller elements within an art piece that contain or reflect the work itself or its elements, becomes pronounced in fictional narratives when a story embedded within the main story shares thematic or structural similarities with it. This structure indicates an infinite recursive loop within the narrative (Cohn & Gleich, 2012, s. 110). Exploring the relationship between metalepsis and *mise en abyme*, Derviřcemalođlu (2019) reveals that positioning characters in fictional works as readers or viewers can lead to the paradox where real readers and viewers might also be considered fictional. This situation blurs the boundaries within and outside the narrative, prompting readers and viewers to question their own existential positions.

Meta-cinema is defined as a genre that encompasses metalepsis, self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-reference, encouraging the audience to question the nature of the work they are experiencing (Ghazouani, 2012; Canet, 2014). The roots of meta-cinema stretch back to the inception of cinema history, with this practice becoming more pronounced, especially in the postmodern era. Meta-cinema creates a narrative by referring to itself, questioning its own existence, and commenting on its narrative processes, thereby explaining how the fiction is constructed. This allows meta-cinema to address its structural and narrative properties, similar to a writing style that highlights its fictional nature by commenting on its own activities (Ott & Walter, 2000). Cinema looks into a mirror to better understand itself and reassess its language, aesthetics, and narrative strategies. Although this process is observed in other art forms like literature and painting, cinema differentiates itself through its unique use of visual and auditory tools to interrogate its essence. Meta-cinema can be seen as a manifestation of cinematic postmodernity; the art of cinema rediscovers a text that includes examples of self-reflection and self-reference through its language and structural features (Canet, 2014). This narrative form also involves the audience in the process. Viewers evaluate the film not just as a story but as a study examining a narrative structure, the language of cinema, and the filmmaking processes. Meta-cinema transforms into a rich and layered dialogue that questions and brings new perspectives to the inner dynamics of cinema, its narrative techniques, and aesthetic values. This process serves as a tool to deepen the expressive power and meaning of cinema for both creators and audiences.

Meta-cinema, while increasing the audience's awareness of the work's structure, complicates the narrative further with characteristics such as postmodern cinema's adoption of a narcissistic discourse about subjects and the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction (Önal, 2010, s. 47). In this process, the director's works reflect personal interests centered around themes like death, while the self-consciousness of the work and its creator offers the audience a new perception of reality (Maule, 2008, s. 150). Moreover, postmodern meta-cinema employs techniques such as narratives within narratives, references to the past, and inversion of the protagonist's position to invite the audience not only into the inner world of the work but also to draw attention to their perception of reality. Such techniques, especially in video games like *Alan Wake II*, enhance the capacity for awareness of the game and the characters' fictional structure and question the interactive nature of this fictionality.

Alan Wake II's metanarrative practices, akin to filmic examples like *Adaptation*, where characters understand their fictional creation, offer insight into the creative process in both games and films. This reflection on a screenwriter's internal conflicts serves as a direct link to the creative journey, highlighting metanarrative's role in bridging various media forms. Video games, as interactive platforms, push the boundaries of narrative fiction and its analysis, inviting a reevaluation of traditional narratological theories to embrace the medium's interactivity. Adapting narratological concepts for video games

enriches the field by providing a nuanced understanding of the medium's layered nature, incorporating its aesthetic, narrative, and interactive elements. The unique structure of video games distinguishes them from traditional narrative media, with their algorithmic base enabling complex narrative experiences. Incorporating intertextuality and intermediality into their analysis not only expands their narrative capabilities but also offers a comprehensive framework for examining video games from both new media and traditional narratological perspectives, facilitating a deeper exploration of diverse narrative structures.

The phenomenon described by Brooks (1999) as meta-linear cinematic narrative is a technology-based narrative form that allows for the integration of multiple stories and perspectives in a web-like structure. This is achieved by storing story elements in a semantic network and reorganizing these elements to form various linear narratives. The fundamental feature of meta-linear cinematic narrative is its potential to create and tell a story in different ways, offering flexibility and versatility to both the narrator and the reader. Brooks' projects such as *Agent Stories* demonstrate how this innovative narrative form can be applied; it makes decisions about how to sequence story elements using software agents, thereby dynamically reconfiguring the narrative.

The transformative power of hypermedia and hypertext concepts in digital narrative forms is particularly evident in the evolution of video games and the development of meta-linear cinematic narratives. These relatively new media forms amalgamate various types of media such as text, sound, image, and video, enriched with electronic cross-references that allow users to navigate agilely between pieces of information. This not only enables users to explore information but also allows them to interactively create their own narratives (Millard, 2020). However, the development of these interactive narratives requires careful planning in the organization and presentation of narratives; authors and developers must harmonize story elements and game mechanics to ensure narrative coherence.

Meta-linear cinematic narrative is an innovative model that represents the author's intent through a multi-layered system of connections. Brooks (1999, s. 87) emphasizes that he does not fully equate meta-linear cinematic narrative with video games per se, but rather views video games as a conduit for meta-linear cinematic narrative. This is related to the inherently interactive and multi-layered nature of video games; the decisions players make in the game world directly affect the flow and outcomes of the story. This interactivity naturally offers the ability to establish dynamic connections between story elements and explore various narrative paths, which is one of the fundamental features of the meta-linear narrative. For example, a video game can direct a player along different story paths based on their decisions or offer players the opportunity to explore the game's world and characters in depth, independent of the story's progression. This grants players the flexibility to derive multiple stories from the same narrative material, exactly as the meta-linear narrative model intends. Thus, video games have the potential to effectively express the author's or game designer's intent through the actions and choices of players. Furthermore, the visual and auditory elements provided by video games present the connections between narrative elements in a more intuitive and impactful manner. This enriches the navigation between story elements and the exploration of different layers of the narrative.

ALAN WAKE II: A DETECTIVE AND HORROR STORY IN A METALEPTIC SPIRAL

The narrative of *Alan Wake* is centered on the themes of words' power and creativity, following the story of a thriller novelist whose life intertwines with his fiction in a mysterious journey. In the first game, Alan suffering from writer's block, visits Bright Falls on his wife Alice's suggestion, hoping to find creative inspiration. However, his stay turns into more than he bargained for, leading to his disappearance by the game's end. The sequel introduces a dual narrative, continuing Alan's story while introducing Saga Anderson, who investigates cult murders in the Couldron Lake area, revealing Alan's unexpected return. The investigation into the Couldron Lake murders and the discovery of screenplay fragments hint at metaleptic elements within the story, with Saga's encounter with Alan marking a key metaleptic moment. Research indicates that the detective genre's epistemological structure significantly influences the functionality of metalepsis. *Alan Wake*'s narrative, through Saga's detective work, finds a balance between metalepsis's fantastical aspects and the detective genre's rational and logical approach, integrating rationality, logic, and mystery resolution with metalepsis's unpredictability. In *Alan Wake*

II, the detective story's focus on unraveling mysteries tends to overshadow the metaleptic twists, aligning with the detective genre's emphasis on solving puzzles over surprising developments.



Figure 1. Reflections of the blurring and metaleptic transition between narrative layers in the game

On the other hand, the possibility of Saga and Alex Casey being part of Alan Wake's fictional world creates a metaleptic transition space within the game's own plane, while the narrative's reinforcement through live-action format interludes, featuring the director's own participation in these scenes, causes a spillover from fictionality into the real world. Moreover, the developer Remedy expands the metaleptic jumping spaces by building bridges between its other games, *Max Payne* and *Control*, and the *Alan Wake* series through what they call the *Remedy Connected Universe*. References to *Max Payne* and scenes highlighting the character of Alex Casey, narrated in monologues by the actor who voices Max Payne, exhibit metalepsis occurring across numerous planes, aligning with Ryan's (2006) definition of ontological metalepsis. Furthermore, this blurring and overlapping between layers is reflected in the game's visual narrative style (see Figure 1.). With its layered narrative structure, *Alan Wake II* contains many stories within a story, extending beyond its fundamental story plane through references to other games tied to the fictional universe, alongside the precursor game, and simultaneously transitions its main character -through the mechanisms of the Scratch and Zane characters- from a protagonist to an antagonist position, closely mirroring the narrative form of postmodern meta-cinema at numerous points.

The phenomenon of four-dimensional metalepsis defined by Fludernik (2003) is functional for elucidating in detail the metaleptic features within the game's narrative structure and their effects on player experience. Alan Wake's assumption of the narrator's role while simultaneously becoming trapped within his own written story aligns with Fludernik's defined dimensions of authorial metalepsis and narrative metalepsis. This aspect of the game encompasses Alan Wake's efforts to alter reality by making additions at certain points in the story and manipulating the narrative through the *Writer's Room*. This situation reveals potential transitions between the narrative dimensions and serves as an example of how existing fictional worlds can interweave. Saga's analysis of collected evidence in a mental space called *Mind Place* unveils another layer of metaleptic depth in the game's narrative. This feature points to the dimension of narrative metalepsis, reflecting the interaction between different fictional levels within the narrative and the impact of this interaction on the narrative. In *Alan Wake II*, the hubs representing the mindscapes of both main characters (see Figure 2.) create an illusion that may lead players to believe they are controlling the flow of the story through these intermediaries.

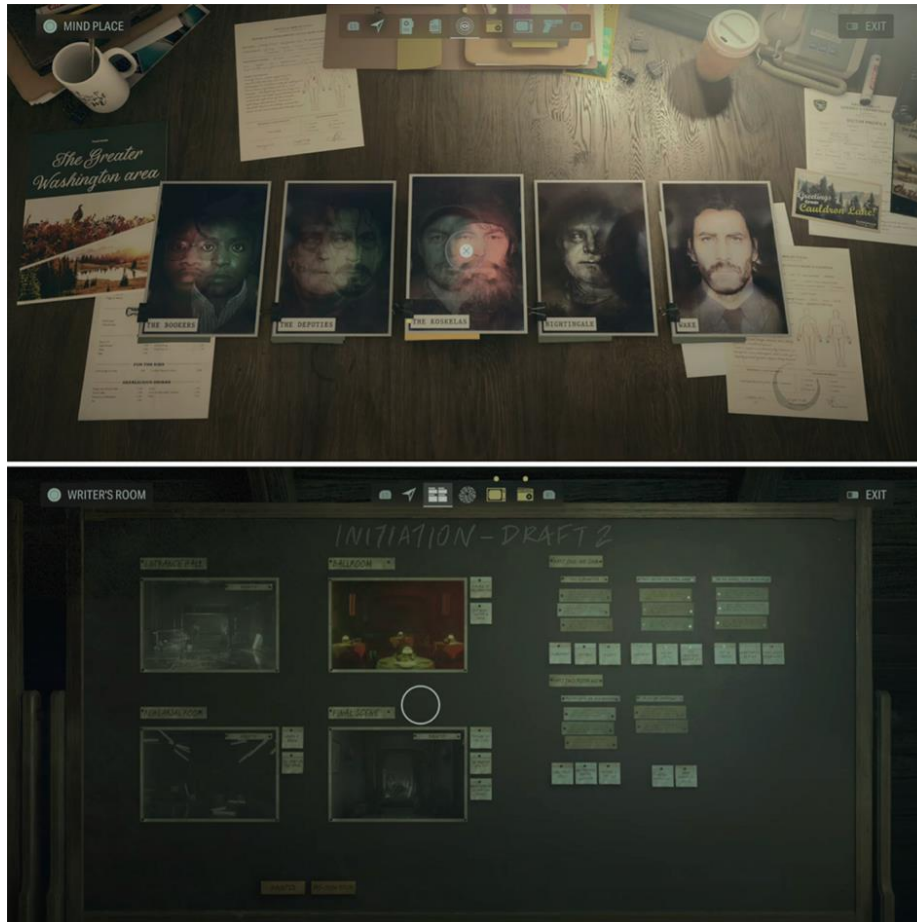


Figure 2. Images of Writer's Room and Mind Place that reflect the layers of the characters' mindscapes

In certain sequences where Alan Wake is under the player's control, this interactivity transforms into a form of participation in the author's creative process for the player. To escape the reality he is trapped in, Alan Wake must complete the missing pieces of the story he has created. When the player finds these missing pieces, they gain the ability to make additions to the story, altering the game space. This situation grants functional significance to the narrative and aesthetics in terms of game mechanics. The evidence compiled by Saga, another playable character, in the Mind Place acquires an intertextual functionality, enabling the connection of different story elements and the continuation of the narrative (see Figure 3.). The fiction created through the evidence uncovers the profiles of the culprits, and this profiling process exhibits an intermedial characteristic by being revealed through moving images.



Figure 3. Example of supporting the narrative with game mechanics that enable intertextuality and intermediality

The introduction of Mr. Door as a narrator, adding a new layer to the story in sequences where Alan Wake, the game's natural narrator, loses his own role, indicates the presence of reader metalepsis and rhetorical metalepsis dimensions. Through these sequences of the game, a simultaneous impression between reality and fiction is created. This structure, interwoven with live-action cinematics, further blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction (see Figure 4.). Mr. Door, emerging as the main figure in these sequences where Alan Wake steps into a different narrative plane, possesses characteristics highly reminiscent of the mysterious figure G-Man from the *Half-Life* series, who can travel between dimensions. The naming of this character as Mr. Door, who plays roles behind doors that open to different planes and whom another fictional character within the game, Tim Baker, attempts to unravel the mystery of, is no coincidence. Moreover, the presence of Mr. Door grants Alan Wake an intradiegetic self-reflective capability as the author and narrator of the story.



Figure 4. Visual of characters (Sam Lake, Alan Wake, Mr. Door), each belonging to different layers of reality, meeting on the same fictional plane.

The transitions between in-game cinematics and live-action cinematic scenes are not limited to these characters alone. The main characters controlled by the player, Alan Wake and Saga, transition several times to the world as we know it in its original physical form during the flow of the story. Unlike the example seen with Alex Casey-Sam Lake, these transitions do not subject the characters to a fictional transformation. On the other hand, the presence of Sam Lake in the game under his own name but in a different role highlights a form of self-reflection and acts as a factor that distorts the perception of the story's fictionality, serving as a trigger for questioning the existing fictional status of other characters. Furthermore, Alan Wake's emergence as a character with the power to transform all reality within the current scenario implies a paradoxical situation where the rest of the story's elements could be considered a fiction within fiction. This paradoxical situation, containing self-awareness, is emphasized several times. This becomes even more apparent in the first sequence where Alan Wake finds himself as a guest on Mr. Door's talk show (see Figure 5.). The game does not hesitate to openly declare itself as a meta-narrative while referencing its genre and themes it addresses.



Figure 5. An example of self-awareness as one of the salient elements of meta-narrative formation.

Alan Wake's ability to alter the game's reality highlights metalepsis not just as a narrative device but as an integral part of the game's design and gameplay mechanics. Safe rooms and the flashlight mechanic, where players use light to transform the game environment, exemplify how action elements serve both gameplay and narrative purposes. This manipulation of light not only affects the game space but also enhances environmental storytelling, blending game mechanics with narrative and aesthetics. According to Ryan (2005), this interplay enriches the narrative discourse, while Wolf (2005) views such mechanics as making metalepsis a normalized aspect of the game's universe, especially in fantasy and horror genres. The flashlight deemed an *Object of Power* within the *Remedy Connected Universe*, alongside the explanation of supernatural events as *Altered World Events*, strengthens the player's connection to the game world. Additionally, Alan Wake's self-awareness and its integration into the game's design further engage players, allowing narrative and mechanics to coalesce, thus enchanting players' perceptions of

reality in alignment with the game's narrative.

The sequences featuring Mr. Door particularly stand out with the use of *mise en abyme*. The cyclical narrative in these sequences is perpetuated through the player's interaction with a television screen within the game. The scene displayed on this television screen, where Alan Wake is positioned, sometimes allows for a transition directly into another phase of gameplay, while at other times it serves as a bridge to live-action cinematic scenes. Moreover, throughout the game, numerous instances of similar uses of *mise en abyme* can be encountered (see Figure 6.) The video diary entry that opens after inserting a relevant video cassette found in Wake's ex-wife's apartment into the video player, story elements that appear when approached from the correct angle within the game space, posters related to films starring another fictional character of the game Alex Casey, and various screens throughout the game featuring images of Alan Wake, can be cited as examples of the intermedial use of *mise en abyme*.

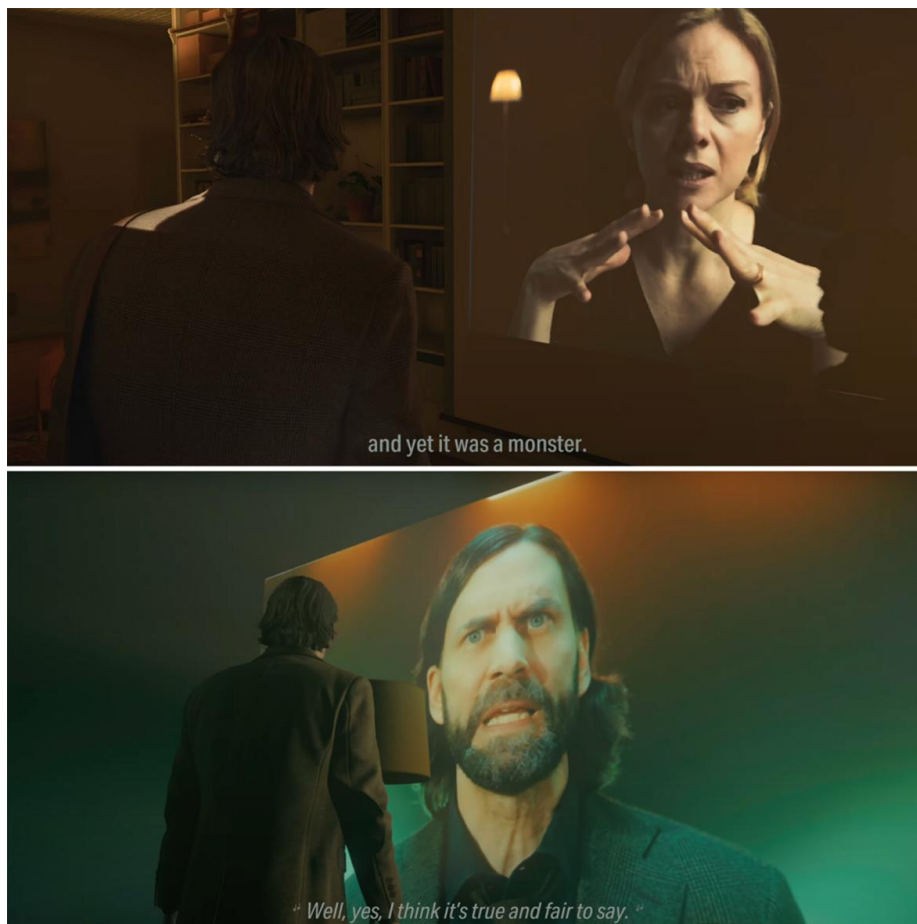


Figure 6. Examples of the use of *Mise en abyme*

In *Alan Wake II*, while creating the illusion of events occurring in chronological order, the story diverges into two different branches set to reconvene. At this juncture, the player is free to choose which storyline of the playable characters, Alan Wake and Saga, to follow. Knowing there is another narrative thread to pursue disrupts this illusion, creating the impression of a non-fixed plot. Regardless of which path the story takes, players encounter numerous temporal gaps, inconsistent characterizations, unresolved tragedies, and situations that seem inexplicable and without conclusion. Although the game is replete with references to the *Hero's Journey* and presents its narrative within this dramatic structure, this form fragments within the game's complex narrative.

Saga, at first glance, appears to represent a hero embarking on a new journey, yet the naming of her segments as *Return* is not coincidental. As Alan Wake's written story affects the entire town of Bright Falls, Saga returns to the town in the dual role of exploring the narrative and as a mother who has

experienced the great tragedy of losing her daughter. However, viewed through the classic *Hero's Journey* arc, Saga's story, beginning at this phase, ironically ends in the *Writer's Room*. This suggests that Saga, in the final stage, returns to Wake's mind, reinforcing suspicions that the character is a subject within a fiction inside the fiction. Alan Wake, in line with the naming of his segments, is in the initiation phase throughout the game. This stage opens the door for a sequel to carry Alan Wake's story forward. Wake completes his initiation process at the game's finale through his creation of a Deus Ex Machina. Saga, victorious in her battle against the *Dark Presence*, needs only to illuminate Alan Wake's mind, clarifying all events. This metaphorical enlightenment ultimately reveals that the main protagonist is not trapped in a loop as presumed but is instead moving towards an exit along a spiral. From a broader perspective, this narrative, with its form and the metaphorical elements it employs, the intended emotional engagement from the player's side, thematic setup, and the presentation of intermedial and intertextual characteristics, demonstrates how the amalgamation of meta-fiction, meta-narrative, and meta-linear cinematic narrative can be uniquely delivered within the video game medium.

CONCLUSION

Video games offer a medium that enables the development of new forms and techniques of narrative, transcending the limitations presented by traditional narrative forms. The potential of digital games to integrate narrative and gameplay, thereby incorporating players' interactions with the story into the narrative itself, is among the primary reasons for this situation. From this perspective, video games stand out not only as a medium for conveying narrative but also as a medium that uses the narrative itself as a tool to open new layers of meaning for players. In *Alan Wake II*, the narrative's layered structure and the game's hosting of numerous story pieces in an intertextual and intermedial manner highlight the meta-linear cinematic narrative structure, giving the player an active role in the process of piecing together the story. This interactive storytelling is particularly manifested in *Alan Wake II* through the combination of meta-narrative and meta-fiction concepts. The game expands the boundaries of narrative by creating stories within stories and facilitating transitions between characters, and even across different fictional universes. This situation offers players not just a rich narrative experience but also prompts inquiries into the structure of the narrative, fictionality, and reality. *Alan Wake II* provides players with the freedom to explore different layers and paths of the story, presenting the game's unique narrative in an integrated manner with gameplay mechanics. With these prominent features, the game sheds light on the potential innovations that video games can bring to the narrative side, raising new questions about how players can form deeper and more meaningful connections with interactive stories.

This study aims to explore the new perspectives and opportunities that the video game medium can offer to narratology by identifying the intersections of meta-fiction, meta-narrative, and meta-linear cinematic narrative concepts within video games. It has been discovered that metaleptic transitions between fictional planes across different layers can be reinforced and integrated with gameplay through interaction. *Alan Wake II*, by encompassing all these features, indicates the possibility of a meta-narrative form distinct from other traditional narrative tools, opening up the discussion on the capability of video games to form a meta-ludological narrative. In this context, a meta-ludological narrative refers to a structure where the ludic (gameplay-based) and narrative elements are intertwined, allowing game mechanics and player choices to shape the story's development and the player's experience, encompassing features related to meta-fiction, meta-narrative, and meta-linear narrative. Moreover, examining other examples involving meta-narrative and meta-fiction within the framework of the interactive freedoms and design components they offer to users is crucial for a clear classification of the elements that constitute this narrative form. Additionally, the findings from *Alan Wake II* invite comparisons with other media, particularly how cinematic techniques are adapted and transformed within video games to achieve a similar or even enhanced narrative effect. Future studies could explore the integration of these techniques across different genres of video games and their impact on narrative delivery and player engagement. This could potentially lead to a deeper understanding of the modalities and efficiencies of storytelling across various interactive environments. By examining these aspects, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the symbiotic relationship between narrative and gameplay, which could inform the design of future digital games and potentially other interactive media forms.

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