Rewrite: An Experimentation in the Field of Interactive Fiction

A Thesis Proposal

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Abstract

An interactive fiction, as a form of video game and virtual reality, tends to be immersive, that is drowning the player as deep as possible into its constructed world. Yet, as a form of experimental literature, or more specifically metafiction, it also tends to be self-conscious of its own form, attracting the player's attention to the constructed quality of its structure. Therefore, any interactive fiction has an inherently paradoxical structure: it aspires to be immersive, but at the same time, due to its experimental nature, breaks the immersiveness by attracting attention to its particular formal quality.

This study uses the theoretical frameworks of Narratology, particularly the theory of metafiction, and ludology, specifically the ideas formed around the notion of immersion, to trace the nature of this paradox back to its origins. Then, it proposes *Rewrite*, an interactive fiction that is going to be made by the author of this thesis, as a practical example to prove that the metafictional qualities of interactive fictions can be used to produce an even stronger sense of immersion for players. *Rewrite* is being developed by Ren'Py, an open source visual novel engine that uses Python as its base of scripting language.

Creating story worlds that allow genuine immersion has been one of the main ambitions of interactive storytellers. Therefore, *Rewrite* along with this thesis strives to get closer to that goal.

Introduction

Experimental Literary practice can take many forms to itself, and we can trace it as far back as Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1757-1759). The word "experimental" refers to unconventional, cutting-edge literature, and it is associated with qualities of shock and affront, iconoclasm, and difficulty (Bray, Gibbons, and McHale 2012). The avant-garde's of the first half of the twentieth century shaped and defined many of the general principles that the experimental literature coming after them was based upon.

> "Multi- and inter-media experiments, experiments with language, identity, visuality and the creative process, the embrace of transformative new technologies, the testing and transgression of the limits of artistic and social acceptability – all of these, and many other features of recent literary experimentalism, are prefigured by the historical avant-gardes. . . . the great isms of the early twentieth century, including Italian and Russian Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Expressionism, down to Existentialism and Absurdism." (Bray, Gibbons, and McHale 2012)

Critical theory gradually shifted its focus to language itself and how it can play an active role in shaping and deforming meaning. The emphasis shifted upon the fact that language comes before meaning, and not the opposite. Therefore, the idea that language is a transparent medium of communication, faithfully and passively conveying the existing concepts of the human mind was substituted by the idea that language is a constructed artifact, functioning based on arbitrary rules. As a result, it should not be taken for granted anymore.

Reflecting the conceptual changes in critical theory, experimental literature became self-conscious of its own form, or in other words its own medium of

communication, that is language. In order to attract attention to the arbitrariness of this

medium, it constantly flaunted its own structure, in a narcissistic way, as Linda Hutcheon

describes it (Hutcheon 2013). But it wasn't until 1970 when this certain characteristic

was given a name by Scholes and Gass: metafiction (Scholes 1970). Scholes was the one

who used the word metafiction for the first time to describe a kind of fiction that

incorporates several structural and philosophical concerns regarding its own process of

creation. As examples of metafictional narratives, Hutcheon highlights Gabriel Garcia

Marquez's *one hundred years of solitude* and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a*

Traveler. What makes them good examples of metafiction is that the storytelling process

is constantly being brought to the reader's attention.

Interactive fiction, as Nick Montfort believes, includes what has been called

> "text game or text adventure along with other works, some of them quite unusual,
> that cannot be easily classed as adventures or games. . . . Such works are able to
> understand natural language input to some extent and, based on such input, to
> effect action in a systematic world that they simulate. . . . For a work to be
> interactive fiction, as the term is understood by those who use it today, it must be
> able to react to input meaningfully. . . . A textual work that offers an interface that
> does not accept natural language at times (e.g. it sometimes presents menus, or
> once in a while asks a question that is to be answered with *y* or *n*) can still be an
> interactive fiction work . . . ." (Montfort 2003)

Interactive fictions also fall under the category of experimental literature, therefore they

share one of the key characteristics of this class, that is attracting attention to their own

process of construction. They provide an experience of unnatural reading for the readers,

inviting them to come up with new methods of sense-making.

Yet, interactive fiction as a form of video game, desires to be immersive. Some

consider it a bliss to lose yourself in the world of your fantasies, to the degree that you

can no longer tell the difference between reality and fiction. Immersion according to Janet Murray is

> "the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality. . . . there is almost nothing to distract you . . . from the densely textured visual and aural environment, but this intense immersion in visiting the place comes at the cost of a diminished immersion in an unfolding story." (Murray 1997)

This description, other than clarifying the notion of immersion in ludology, refers to another important fact, reworded by Linda Hutcheon as a "hermeneutic paradox" produced by metafictional strategies: "readers are forced to acknowledge the fictional status of the narrative, while at the same time they become co-creators of its meanings" (Hutcheon 2013).

In other words, interactive fictions cannot completely achieve the immersive quality, which is expected from an interactive virtual world. It seems like "immersion" and "form-consciousness" are the opposite ends of the spectrum. The "unfolding story," or the narrative process is diminished at the cost of "intense immersion" in the world of the play.

I would like to discuss that the metafictional qualities of interactive fictions are not necessarily a barrier on the way of achieving genuine immersion. On the contrary, it can be used to strengthen the sense of immersiveness and help in merging the real and the virtual together. *Rewrite,* a Ren'Py visual interactive fiction, is going to be the experimentation ground through which I would try to prove my claim. It narrates the story of three women, Clymene, Aegle, and Aetheria. The narrative takes form around each individual woman and grows gradually. The player-character (the user, the one who

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is playing the game and reading the fiction) is a nameless writer who is observing and trying to write the stories of these three women. He has to put together the bits and pieces of the story as they unfold both before his eyes and inside his mind. Sometimes, the characters of the story, the women whose story is being told, address their nameless writer directly, expressing complaint or dissatisfaction about the way their actions and decisions are being interpreted by him/her. This phenomenon attracts the player's attention to the constructed nature of the narrative, yet at the same time breaks the boundary between the real world in which the player exists, and the virtual world of the interactive fiction. The player would be dragged into the world of the play through the appropriate use of metafiction. Also, the deliberate choice of the player-character as the writer violates the reader/writer boundary and makes the reader/player part of the very process of writing, or metanarration. In other words, the player's position in the outside world as someone who is unfolding the narrative through active participation in the game, becomes united with the nameless writer inside of the game who is also trying to write the story of the three women. Once more, metafiction creates a stronger sense of immersion for the player. These are examples of how *Rewrite* will try to take advantage of metafiction in favor of making its virtual reality into a more immersive environment.

Let us get back to Murray:

> "The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content. We refer to this experience as immersion. *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus." (Murray 1997, 98)

I believe it is definitely worthwhile to contribute to creating an even more perfect "plunge," and to play a part in augmenting the sense of pleasure that ensues. This is what *Rewrite* strives to achieve through its specific form and content that will be discussed in more detail in the "materials and methods" section.

Literature Review

Experimental literature could be traced back to Lawrence Stern's *Tristram Shandy* in eighteenth century. *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* states that the historical avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century were the ones who set the ground for the idea of "the experimental". One of the main characteristics of experimental literature is that it constantly attracts the reader's attention to its own form, to the medium through which it is constructed, namely the language itself (Bray, Gibbons, and McHale 2012, 1–18). Based on post-structuralism, this is a tendency to remind the reader not to take language for granted; that our medium of communication is not just a transparent framework through which meaning is conveyed, but a generator of meaning itself.

Richard Lanham also talks about the "mediated nature of text" in *The Electronic Word*. Digitization destabilizes the text and enables "that characteristic oscillation between looking AT symbols and looking THROUGH them" (Lanham 1994, 24). This destabilization of the text also destabilizes the viewer, making him/her conscious of the act of looking, and conscious of the object that is being looked. Self-conscious art is the kind of art that invites the viewer to focus on its process of construction rather than on the end-product. Lanham calls this act of going back and forth between looking *at* things and looking *through* things bi-stable oscillation.

Bolter and Gromala take the notion of the transparency of the medium and apply it to computer as media. They reject the structuralist orientation of engineers to offer instead a picture of digital media as an emergent form that is constantly defining itself in a mutual relationship with users:

> "The mistake that [Jacob] Nielsen and [Don] Norman make is to assume that the single goal of all design is to make the interface transparent, when in fact the goal is to establish an appropriate rhythm between being transparent and reflective. This is a common error in mainstream interface design and HCI [Human Computer Interaction] today. Despite evidence of the popularity of experiential Web sites, computer designers and HCI experts still suppose that the best interface is always "clear," "simple," and "natural."" (Bolter and Gromala 2005, 6)

Form and content are inseparable, and we should always keep an eye on how the interface shapes our experience.

Interactive fiction as an experimental type of literature is also form-conscious. Hayles and Montfort discuss interesting examples of interactive fiction, both in printed and digital form, with extremely complex formats (Hayles and Montfort 2012, 452-466). My favorite example in printed form is Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel* (1989). In the introduction we are informed that the dictionary represents everything about the Khazars in alphabetical order in the three great traditions of Islam, Christianity, and Jewism. The three traditions agree on one thing only: in the tenth century, the Kaghan of Khazars invites the representatives of each tradition to interpret his dream, promising to convert to the religion of the one who presents the best possible interpretation. Later, the Khazar kingdom is attacked and eventually it vanishes from the pages of history without anyone knowing the result of the competition between the three great religions. After this preliminary introduction, the "editor" invites the reader to adopt any reading strategy she wishes to go through the three books (the red Christian book, the yellow Jewish book, and the green Moslem one) that are alphabetic listing of entries. She can go through them horizontally (just going through the books one by one), vertically (reading each entry in the three books and comparing them together), or haphazardly (not

following any particular pattern). After several readings and rereadings, finally a meta-narrative takes form. As the story world emerges gradually, the reader finds out about the story of Adam, the first man, who occupied the third level of heaven. After disobeying God and being expelled from heaven, he unlike Lucifer repents and returns to heaven only to find out that he has lost his previous place in the third level and that he has to stay in the tenth. Out of grief and extreme desire to get back to his previous place, his body constantly drifts back and forth between the third and tenth levels, causing his body to be stuck in a circular process of dispersal and reassembly. Dream hunters are the ones who are trying to reassemble Adam's body, searching for its fragments in the dreams of mirror-symmetrical pairs who dream each other's lives. Demons get in their way all the times to destroy any piece of evidence they might find in dreams. The book also refers to its own form, leading the reader's attention to the process of its construction. Adam's body is just like the book itself, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, and the reader is like the dream hunter who is trying to put fragments of the text together to approach the ultimate story.

In the realm of digital interactive fictions, *Bad Machine* (1998) is a good example of form-consciousness. The player-character has to control a defective robot, therefore, the textual exchange resembles defective language consisting of unusual punctuation marks, cryptic programming codes, and error and warning messages. Plot does not play an important role, instead the interactor should follow the hints of style, ways of functioning, and other form-related elements.

In *Literary Gaming*, Astrid Ensslin discusses the ludic (what is related to game and play) with the literary, where the interactor is a reader and player at the same time. She opens the book by stating that:

> "However the past decade has seen a proliferation of [such] digital media hybrids, and it is against this creative and cultural backdrop that this book seeks to correct the widely held view that games and literature do not really go together. It aims to draw attention to a new form of experimental literary art that is closely tied to digital media as a productive, receptive, and participatory platform, and that requires entirely novel ways of close play and reading." (Ensslin 2014, 7)

Functional ludostylistics is how she calls her synthetic methodology for analyzing this digital media hybrid. It is consisted of ludology, ludonarratology, ludosemiotics, and mediality. Through close reading and playing of a cross cut of the L-L (Ludic-Literary) spectrum, She talks about interesting concepts such as the unnatural narrative technique of the "textual *you*" which is used to expose readers as accomplices in the world of the game.

The notion of metafiction in Narratology was first formed in the works of William H. Gass, and Robert Scholes. "Playing divine games," is what a novelist does according to Gass. Novelists, just like philosophers, are "obsessed with language"; they "create worlds" telling us "how it is," making "our world strange" by trying to remind us what we know as reality could be of an illusory nature. The novelist "make[s] something, not merely describe something that might be made." He/she "will keep us kindly imprisoned in his language – there is literally nothing beyond. . . . there are no descriptions in fiction, there are only constructions . . . ." A work of fiction, therefore, does not mimic anything in the outside world, it is a self-sufficient entity in itself that adds to reality (Gass 1978, 3–26). Yet this construction is not made with a pure medium. Language, the medium

with which the novelist works, is imperfect; its "every scrap has been worn, every item handled" (Gass 1978, 27–33). Scholes was the one who used the word metafiction for the first time to describe a kind of fiction that incorporates several structural and philosophical concerns regarding its own process of creation (Scholes 1970). A decade later Linda Hutcheon tries to come up with more comprehensive definitions for the theory of metafiction. She beautifully calls narratives with metafictional qualities "narcissistic" because they constantly draw the reader's attention to themselves and the way they are representing their content (Hutcheon 2006, 1). Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *one hundred years of solitude* and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* are good examples of metafiction because in their narrative the storytelling process is constantly being brought to the reader's attention. "Metafictional strategies therefore often produce a hermeneutic paradox: readers are forced to acknowledge the fictional status of the narrative, while at the same time they become co-creators of its meanings" (Neumann and Nünning 2012).

Hamlet on the Holodeck discusses technologies of narrative, both pre- and post-Gutenberg, highlighting those that are emerging in cyberspace, like ways of storytelling that play with the borderline between fiction and reality, that require the reader to participate actively in the process, or that offer more than one possible plotline. Among many interesting concepts discussed in this book, the most important one for the purposes of this study is the notion of immersion, or in other words suspension of disbelief:

> "the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. We enjoy the movement of our familiar world, the feeling of alertness that comes from being in this new place, and the delight comes from learning to move within it." (Murray 1997, 98–99)

Yet immersion can also lead to what Murray metaphorically calls "alien kiss." She refers to the story of *Star Trek: Voyager* and the fate of its main character Captain Kathryn Janeway. Kathryn is used to spend her leisure time in her favorite Victorian gothic virtual reality generated by holodeck,

> "an empty black cube covered in white gridlines upon which a computer can project elaborate simulations by combining holography with magnetic force fields and energy-to-matter conversions. The result is an illusory world that can be stopped, started, or turned off at will but that looks and behaves like the actual world and includes parlor fires, drinkable tea, and characters . . . who can be touched, conversed with, and even kissed. (Murray 1997, 15)

An alien enemy decides to take advantage of this fact against her by generating visions of the holodeck characters and setting them loose around the ship. Eventually the alien succeeds in seducing Janeway who has lost her ability to distinguish between reality and illusion, by disguising in the form of her lover, Mike who is far away. After Janeway kisses the alien, she enters a kind of trance-like state. Murray discusses later that this type of intense immersion in virtual reality can distract the interactor's attention from how the story is being unfold, or in other words, from the structure of the story.

Andrew Glassner defines his quest as finding a way to combine storytelling and gaming. He defines the concept of "flow experience" as "the sensation of being completely absorbed in a demanding but rewarding task, so that everything else seems to slip away" (Glassner 2004, 138). Stronger experiences of flow will lead to stronger engagement in the process of the game and eventually will result in greater emotional responses. He brings forth arguments that are against the idea of interactive storytelling because according to one of them "interaction does not improve storytelling" (Glassner

2004, 221). A great story's structure needs to be designed by a skilled writer, and a player who is making choices to determine how the story would look like in the end, will only make that carefully crafted structure to be crumbled into pieces. Glassner tries to propose solutions for the dilemma of interactive storytelling that is making the player part of the process of storytelling, without causing chaos and disjointing the coherence of content and form. For example, the idea of "living masks" (Glassner 2004, 373) increases the degree of the player's participation in the game. The "mask" would observe the player's reactions during the game and map them to kinds of behavior that would fit the personality of the character in the game. In this way the story's characterization would remain intact, while at the same time the player's choices would have an active role within the game world. In general, it is interesting how Glassner addresses the contradiction between preserving a well-made story and structure, and at the same time keeping the "flow experience" at its highest point.

There are some people like Ernest Adams who feel like they don't have any patience for the "postmodern trend" of self-referential texts. He believes winking at the player in the middle of the game to remind him/her that "don't forget! This is just a game!" is not only cute or clever, but it will harm the game experience. It is like "a direct slap in the face." (Adams 2004)

He recognizes three types of immersion in a game. "Tactical immersion is immersion in the moment-by-moment act of playing the game, and is typically found in fast action games. It's what people call being in the zone or in the groove" (Adams 2004). It is a mediation-like state when the higher brain functions are mostly shot down and the player becomes a pair of eyes and two hands. Strategic immersion is a cerebral kind of

involvement with the game when the player is trying to find the best possible way among many available choices. It involves observation, calculation, and deduction. The third type is narrative immersion that happens when the player starts to care about the story and gets involved with the characters of the game. Adams concludes by stating that maintaining the suspension of disbelief in a game is difficult. The slightest reference to the outside of the imaginary world of the game could easily destroy it, therefore he asks game designers not to do it, unless they think it is really worth the cost.

On the other hand James Cox who published the blog post "The Four Types of Metafiction in Videogames" believes something else:

> "with metafiction we may prevent players from being sucked out of play due to loading screens, and prevent them from being reminded of a game's fake-ness through menus or glitches. It could very well lead to longer periods of flow and immersed audiences." (Cox 2014)

He classifies videogame metafiction into four types: emergent metafiction (e.g. when a character addresses the player directly and talks to her/him), immersive metafiction (when the game takes advantage of the unique position of the player outside of the game and incorporates it into the system, for example the player can be a kind of god who has the life and death of the in-game character simulations in her/his hands), internal metafiction (e.g. awareness of the characters of the game that they are mere simulations inside a game), and external metafiction (designer to player).

Cox borrows the term "fourth wall" and "breaking the fourth wall" from Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* to explain the idea of metafiction in video games. The phrase originally belongs to Greek plays. Each theatre stage usually has three walls and the

fourth wall refers to the audience. Anytime one of the players on the stage talks to the audience directly to provide further comments, explanations, or ask them something, they would in other words "break the fourth wall" and highlight the fictionality of the play. Finally that is how he concludes:
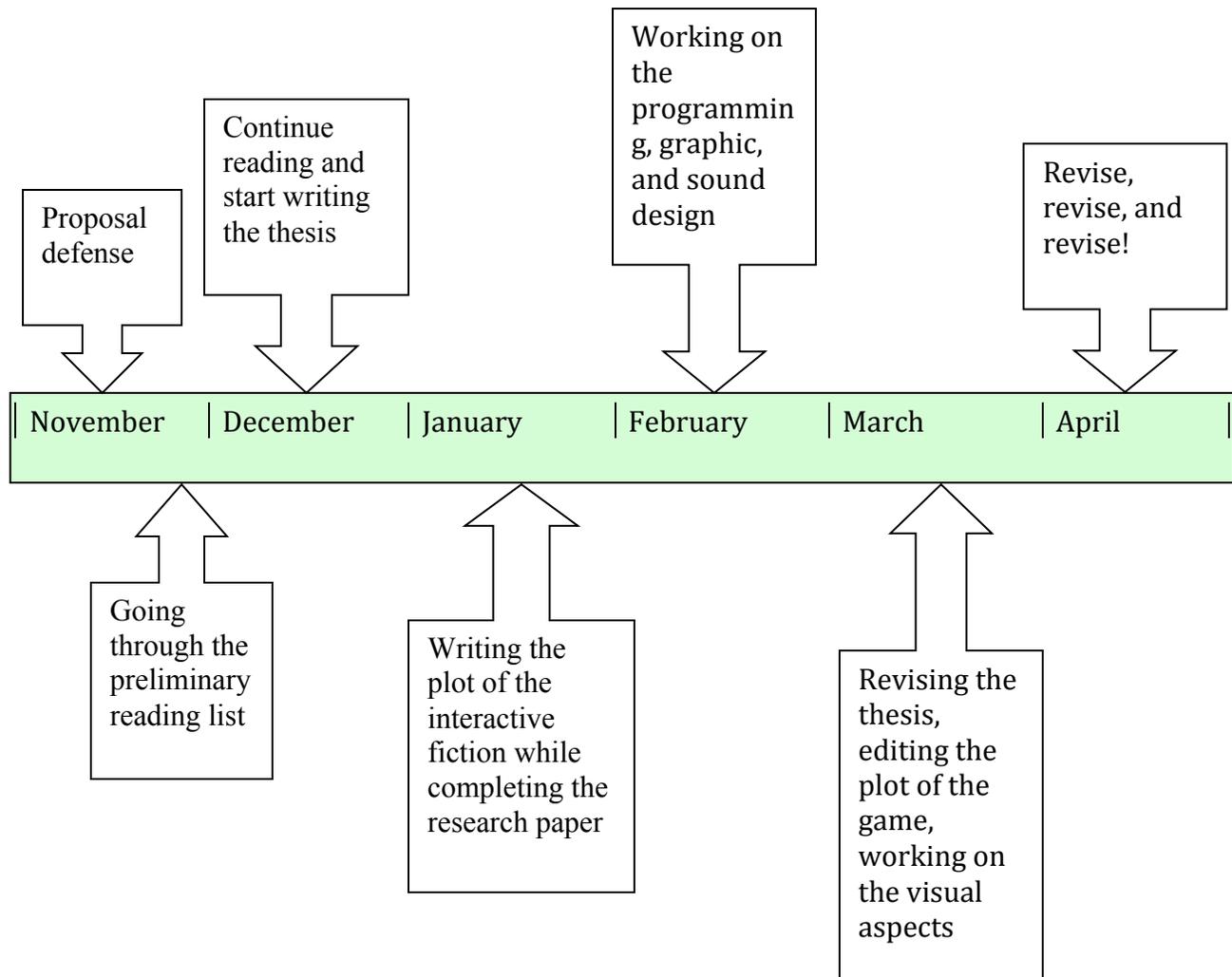
> "Metaficiton in videogames can have a grand impact on the future of videogames. There is the potential for deepening story, strengthening audience to narrative ties, and increasing player immersion within the game. The ability of a game to acknowledge its own fictionality (its own fakeness) while still remaining within the bounds of acceptable play, and not violating the player's trust, could be used to make games more functionally smooth. Menu screens and tutorials, elements of games that typically remove the player from the fictional universe and break flow, could be phased out and, in their place, metafictional elements could be employed to keep the game going." (Cox 2014)

Project Scope and Timeline

Designing an interactive fiction is a complicated task during which many aspects should be taken into account. Writing the plot while considering all the possible branches of the story and taking into consideration all the choices that the player can make, and all the probable outcomes of the story are only one portion of the project. Other tasks include programming of the game, designing the graphics, and also the sounds. Usually, different individuals or teams take care of the various parts of a single project. When the author, programmer, and graphic and sound designer are all the same person, this will inevitably prolong the production time. Therefore, to be able to finish the project on time, I have decided to present only a "vertical slice" of the interactive fiction. I will show how every component of the game works, in other words, a bit of everything. All the features and functions that are necessary for the completion of the work will be presented.

Timeline

Proposal defense

Continue reading and start writing the thesis

Working on the programming, graphic, and sound design

Revise, revise, and revise!

| November | December | January | February | March | April |

Going through the preliminary reading list

Writing the plot of the interactive fiction while completing the research paper

Revising the thesis, editing the plot of the game, working on the visual aspects

Materials and Methods

Narratology, a branch of literary criticism that deals with the structure and function of narratives, has been used before by people like Nick Montfort, to define and categorize interactive fictions (Montfort 2011, 25-58). This study will use narratology as its theoretical framework to discuss the idea that interactive fictions could be considered both metafiction and metanarration. Metanarration refers to those moments in a narrative when the narrator indicates the process of narration itself; it is a story about a story, a totalizing narrative that explains and encompasses all the other little stories involved. Metafiction refers to how a text attracts the readers' attention to the constructedness or fictionality of itself. The purpose of this self-reflexivity is to invite readers to pay attention to the fact that they are dealing with something which is an arbitrary artifact and they should not take it for granted.

Another theoretical method that is going to be used in this thesis, would be ludology, and specifically how it addresses the notion of "immersion" in video games. By definition, ludology is the study of games and gaming, in particular video games. Immersion happens when the player feels himself/herself to be completely surrounded by the alternative reality of the game without any distraction to drag him/her out of that virtual world.

Then, it will be discussed that how being immersive and form-conscious at the same time have been considered opposite traits for games so far, and how these notions can be reconciled to design a well-crafted interactive fiction.

The exhibition ground for the critical analysis of interactive fictions mentioned above would be *rewrite*, the visual novel, or graphic interactive fiction that I am working to write. It narrates the story of three women, Clymene, Aegle, and Aetheria. The narrative revolves around each individual woman's life and grows gradually. The player-character, an anonymous writer who is observing and trying to write the stories of these three women, has to put together the bits and pieces of the story as they keep unfolding here and there. The deliberate choice of the player-character as the writer is a structural example showing how the reader/writer boundary is being violated and makes the reader/player part of the very process of writing, or metanarration in other words.

The unique feature of the game would be its rewrite button. At certain points during the game, the anonymous author would come to the decision that he does not like the current course of the events. That is when the button comes in handy to go back to a designated point in time and start over. Yet, it is not clear that the occurring change is only happening in the writer's mind or it is also affecting the course of events in the "physical" world.

Ren'Py is a visual novel engine that works with Python programming language. The reason I chose this particular tool to program my visual novel is that it is an open source platform; in other words, anyone can customize it by adding chunks of python code to build the desired features. It is highly customizable, and many complex games have been made with its help before. Also, it makes it easy to combine words, images,

and sounds for the purpose of digital storytelling. I intend to use my own photographs, videos, and sound environments to create a unique story world for *Rewrite*.

My prior experience with Ren'Py could be summed up in *Trauma*, the first interactive fiction I made using this engine. This is the brief note I included inside the game as an introduction:

> ***"Trauma*** is a work of interactive fiction through which I have tried to represent part of my history along with excerpts of the current social and political situation of my country. Using a mixture of words, images and sounds, gave me a unique opportunity to recreate my internal and external worlds in a way that is more tangible to the readers. Expanding the emotional range of the narrative is another objective achieved through the proper use of sounds and images. Also, choosing the medium of "game" for the purpose of conveying some of my most "serious" preoccupations adds a tint of irony to the story, making it even richer in the realm of implied meanings.
>
> The player character is a psychologist with extraordinary powers who enters his patient's mind after a brief conversation with her and tries to change her memories in order to improve her present situation. The psychologist does not know anything about Maral, his patient; a characteristic which makes him a suitable player character, since "the player's awareness will initially match that of the player character" (Montfort 2008). The player finds the opportunity to explore Maral's memories through the eyes of the psychologist, figure out her past history and experience them anew.
>
> There is no quest to be accomplished. The reader is only immersed in a sort of stream of consciousness in which he/she can make changes through the medium of the psychologist. The existing gaps in the narrative imitate the way one leaps from one memory to the other while reviewing them in his/her mind, since memories usually do not exist in a linear and chronological system. Anyway, in order to avoid complication, I have tried to simplify my stream of consciousness as much as possible.
>
> Most of my photos and images have a story behind themselves; a story which binds social and personal spheres together and adds layers of meaning to *Trauma*. There is a photo of a boy or maybe a girl, carved on the door of a dirty electricity box by an unknown artist in one of the streets of Tehran. The carved boy/girl has a strange melancholic expression on his/her face that I was lucky enough to capture by camera since it was deleted a few days later. Another example is the photo used for the "graveyard section." It is a painting on the wall of the Indian Temple in the southern city of Bandar Abbas, actually one of the few that is left since most of the walls are plastered to cover the paintings. The image of the woman that appears in the ending section is a work of art created by

the native women of Hormoz Island in the Persian Gulf. They use the colorful and sparkling soils of the Island to draw these images on glass." (Fatemi 2012)

The game can be downloaded from here:

http://www.mediafire.com/download.php?b1bl9ipx8cxyngg

Intended Outcomes

While reviewing the history of experimental literature, video game, and interactive fiction, I ran into a dilemma. Interactive fiction, as a hybrid form, that is a form of experimental literature and a video game at the same time, has a contradictory characteristic. As a form of experimental literature, it tends to be self-consciously aware of its own form, and inevitably attracts the attention of anyone who comes to interact with it to its structure. On the other hand, it needs to be immersive as a video game, to provide a pleasant game experience to its players. This is where it runs into the dilemma: how is it possible to be aware of its own form, or in other words, remind the player of its own fictionality and yet do not break the sense of immersion or suspension of disbelief?

This study tries to answer that question both theoretically and practically. In the theoretical sphere, by juxtaposing the ideas formed around the notion of metafiction in Narratology, and the category of immersion discussed in ludology, this research will propose methods to reconcile the two contradictory streams. In the practical sphere, *Rewrite* will provide an example to show how an interactive fiction can be both form-conscious and immersive at the same time.

Potential Dissemination

This version of rewrite that will be designed specifically for thesis purposes is only a "vertical slice," showing the general form, the important functions, and key characteristics of *Rewrite*. Therefore, the next step for *Rewrite* would be the complete form, including all the branch stories, and visual properties.

Apart from my content management system, it will also appear on www.games.renpy.org. Any game made with Ren'Py could have the opportunity to be shared on Ren'Py's website if approved by the Ren'Py team. I would like to use this chance as another window for sharing and promoting my game.

Another way to distribute *rewrite* would be through "Steam." It is an internet-based platform for the digital distribution of games. Digital rights management, and social networking are other services provided by Steam developers, Valve corporation. The social networking feature of Steam, such as groups and friends lists, can be used to get in touch with the gamers community, request feedback, and develop the game based on the community's response. 100 million active users for more than 3700 games available through Steam could be a good testimony to steam's popularity (Valve corporation 2014). According to an estimation by *Screen Digest*, in October 2013, 75% of games bought online for PC are downloaded through Steam (Edwards 2013).

They use a system called "Greenlight" to evaluate new games. Developers post screenshots, videos, and information about their games and if they manage to attract enough community support, their game would be distributed through Steam. Greenlight

also allows under development games to form an active community around themselves and gather feedback that can help improve the game. Of course, it is not going to be free! Any developer should pay $100 to have an account on steam and submit a game. This is to avoid spam submissions, and they claim all proceeds are donated to Child's Play, a charity organization working to improve lives of children in over 70 hospitals all over the world.

GamersGate is a Sweden-based online digital distribution platform for PC and Mac games. To encourage user participation, it has introduced the notion of Blue Coins. Users of this platform can earn Blue Coins, that is GamersGate's virtual currency, through participating in various types of activity on the website, such as writing reviews, ranking games, and contributing to the Game Tutor program by providing other users with information about difficult levels of the games, or other game-based solutions. Blue Coins can also be purchased by cash. Gamersgate also could be a potential portal for the distribution of *rewrite.*

I am also aspiring to submit the completed work to Game Developers Conference (GDC). GDC is the largest annual gathering of professional game developers, covering all sorts of topics such as business and management, design, programming, production, and visual arts. It attracts over 23000 attendees with the most interesting part – to me – being the Independent Games Festival (IGF). IGF is the largest and longest-running festival related to independent game development. It is a good opportunity for any developer to attract the attention of the publishing community. Another interesting part of GDC is the Game Developers Choice Awards, where one can gain peer-recognition in the vast world of game industry.

The IndieCade Festival is another big independent game celebration, held each October in Los Angeles. It is a great venue due to its productive networking environments, and accepts interactive media of all types including works in progress. The finalists are selected by the leaders of industry, academia, fine arts, and independent game development. Also, anyone who submits work for the festival is considered for presentation at the IndieCade Showcases. In general, it is a good opportunity for any indie game developer to highlight his/her work and make it visible to the eyes of the industry and public.

IFComp, the Interactive Fiction Competition, is an annual event started in 1995 to encourage the creation and discussion of interactive fiction also known as IF. Anyone can judge the IF entries on a one-to-ten scale and the games with the best average rating win. As an independent creator, I find this event an invaluable chance, since I can place *Rewrite* in an environment that can be read and judged by those who are passionate about this particular form of art. Besides the general competition judged by the public and fans, there is also a secondary competition allowing the authors of that year's games to vote on one another's entries. The three most highly ranked entries become the winners of Miss Congeniality Awards, with their names being permanently recorded in that year's results listing.

I will send *Rewrite* to as many competitions, conferences, and digital distribution platforms as possible with the purpose of gathering feedback from passionate hobbyists and professionals in this field. The more people play *Rewrite* and comment on it, the more I will have a chance to polish and refine the game. *Rewrite* is just the beginning of the way. All the experience and skill accumulated in the process of creating, polishing,

and distributing it will be used towards invention of even more complex literary and visual qualities in future productions.

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