SPACE AS A REMEDIATION OF THE CHARACTER 'S METAPHOR: A NARRATIVE PROVOCATION[1]

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ABSTRACT

The joy of navigation is one main feature of digital games. Mastering space evokes agency, and it can be a resource to enhance the player's immersion. Space can contribute to immediacy and hypermediacy when privileging transparency and opacity of the media, respectively. This paper analyzes the game's space as remediation of the character's metaphor, fostering the players' agency that supports engagement. The close reading method explores the digital game Journey through narrative poetics, remediation, and agency. The results suggest that the character's metaphor allows the player to dialogue with the space, and immersion promotes pleasure. Finally, it is argued that immersion supports the environment's transparency, enabling player engagement.

Keywords: Poetics, Close reading, Videogame, Journey

RESUMO

Nos jogos digitais, o prazer da navegação pode ser interpretado como uma das características de agência, e pode se explorado como recurso para potencializar a imersão do jogador. Assim como todos os elementos de um jogo, que são orquestrados por uma narrativa, o espaço pode ser projetado de maneira a influenciar esse processo de imersão, possibilitando tanto a imediação como a hipermediação, quando há momentos de transparência e opacidade do meio, respectivamente. Nesse contexto, este artigo analisa o espaço do jogo como uma remediação da metáfora do personagem o que fomenta a agência dos jogadores, provocando o engajamento dos mesmos. Por meio das poéticas de narrativa, remediação e agência, o jogo digital Journey é analisado pelo método close reading. Os resultados sugerem que o espaço como metáfora do personagem permite que o jogador estabeleça um diálogo com o espaço, o qual, juntamente como o prazer da navegação, sustenta a imersão. Por fim, argumenta-se que a imersão alicerça a transparência do meio, provocando o engajamento dos jogadores.

Palavras chave: Poéticas, Close reading, Videogame, Journey.

INTRODUCTION

According to Miranda and Stadzisz (2017, p. 299), a digital game can be understood as a voluntary activity capable of "involving players in conflict resolution," among other characteristics. This involvement among players can occur through collaboration.

In collaborative games, players are encouraged to share what they understand from the playful universe they share. This will allow the coordination of actions, cooperation, and communication that becomes effective to achieve the game's objectives (VICENTE; PIRES, 2018, p. 715). This communication is called collaborative communication, according to the authors. Thus, as companions on the same journey, two or more players share knowledge and communicate to advance in the challenges proposed by the game.

It is essential for the interactive experience that the player is in a state of immersion (HAMILKO, 2014). One way this can happen is through engagement (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1990). Sharing the same journey can engage players to act together, which can collaborate with the immersion state. On the other hand, in a digital game, each formative element of the game, from the setting to the characters' clothing, is likely to communicate information to the player about the game itself, that is, its universe, and how the player can interact in this system (BOGOST, 2007; JÄRVINEN, 2007).

Based on the journey theme present in the Journey game, this paper investigates the agency's poetics (MURRAY, 1997) as a supporter of media transparency in digital media (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 2000). Agency enables the players' engagement and, consequently, immersion. To understand how the narrative in this media is created from navigation, the degree of narrativity is measured. Then, the game is analyzed through the lens of remediation as the agency's provocateur. Finally, it is pointed out how the agency is related to the transparency of the medium, enabling the engagement of players.

The Journey game was chosen for analysis because it is a short game, about 2 hours long (HOW LONG TO BEAT, 2020), for presenting a narrative (RYAN, 2006), and enabling the player's agency, since it is an interactive process (MURRAY, 1997).

New Media and Poetics

The term new media refers to media that present certain principles (MANOVICH, 2001). With the development of computing and the mastering software that allows the composition of images using the binary pattern, the possibilities for modifying, incrementing, creating new visual representations and means of communication have expanded. This **numerical representation is** the fundamental principle that characterizes a new media.

On the other hand, **modularity** is the second principle in importance, as it depends on the numerical representation (MANOVICH, 2001). Through it, it is possible to reuse programming codes already developed to perform different functions.

The third fundamental element that characterizes new media, according to Manovich (2001), is **automation**. When developing a website, for example, a web programmer does not need to write any line of code, just use the pre-programmed blocks provided by some automation tool available.

The **variability** principle, on the other hand, refers to the so-called responsive layout. That is, depending on the support, there is a specific layout that was programmed. It is also called 'liquid media' because it adapts to any shape, whether mobile phone, computer, tablet, etc. Thanks to the complex and complete database that allows this variability.

Finally, there is the concept of **transcoding**. Each media communicates through specific codes, and when this communication process co-occurs in different

digital media, or when the analog code is transformed into digital, it is transcoding. These are the five determining principles of new media (MANOVICH, 2001).

We searched the literature for poetics borrowed from old media and others that have become essential to identify meanings to read these new media. Poetic calls are the structures or forms that produce meaningful content for someone in a medium (BIZZOCCHI; TANENBAUM, 2011). Next, narrative, remediation, and agency poetics are presented, discussed in the Journey object.

Narrative

According to Abbott (2002 apud RYAN, 2006, p.7, our translation), narrative can be defined as "the combination of history and discourse." History, in turn, is "a sequence of events (action)," and narrative discourse is how this sequence of events is presented, that is, how the story is told. Through a discussion of what may or may not be considered narrative, Ryan (2006) goes further and determines its dimensions:

● **Spatial dimension**: the agents involved act in a specific space.

● **Time dimension**: agents undergo some type of transformation, such as moving from one place to another, admitting a causa-and-effect relationship.

● **Mental dimension:** agents react and make choices throughout events that occur.

● **Pragmatic and formal dimension**: the sequence of events must culminate in a particular end. These events must make a logical sense of the history of the world presented. On the other hand, the story must communicate something meaningful to the receiver.

Ryan (2006) highlights the influence of narratives on the mental process of memories. According to the author, "all memories are saved in the form of stories," and the "narrative is a type of text with the capacity to evoke a certain type of image in the mind of a subject" (p. 10). Furthermore, narratives are "solidified and conscious representations produced by the convergence of many different mental processes that operate within and without stories." (p. 12), highlighting that there is a strong relationship between memories and mental images created by those who read a narrative.

Thus, it is irrelevant to analyze whether or not there is the presence of narrative in a given media, but rather to assess its degree of narrativity. For Ryan (2006), this investigation is based on 11 different narrative possibilities:

● **External**: when the story is told by someone, for example, in a literary text; **Internal**: when the story is told by ourselves in our minds.

● **Fictional**: when the story is not about a fact, was invented by someone, as in the literary text; **Non-fictional**: when the story and facts are accurate and true.

● **Representational**: is the image o one of the various possibilities of action existing in the fictional world; **Simulative:** refers to producing these different possibilities based on the combination of fixed and variable parameters.

● **Diegetic**: when the story is told by someone who is not part of the story; **Mimetic**: when an actor in the story, for example, the protagonist of a film, tells the story to the viewer.

● **Autotelic**: when the objective of telling the story is just to say to it; **Utilitarian**: when the story has a second purpose in addition to being revealed.

● **Autonomous**: when the story is unpublished for the receiver and presented only through the textual medium; **Illustrative**: when the story is presented through images and requires pre-knowledge about the receiver.

● **Scripted**: when the story follows a pre-established script; **Emergent**: when the story allows improvisation, allowing the so-called agency of the receiver. In the case of digital games, the emergent narrative is the interactor created in his mind when playing, that is, how many times he lost, how many times he gained, among others (SALEN; ZIMMERMAN, 2004).

● **Receptive**: refers to 'hot' media, which do not require viewer participation. **Participative** refers to the term 'cool' media, which allows the active participation of the spectator. This type of media is understood as an extension of the receiver's senses. 'Hot' and 'cool' are definitions assigned by McLuhan (NORDEN, 1969).

● **Determined**: when all action points are presented; **Undetermined**: only a few key points are delivered to the recipient, who must figure out the rest. A photograph, for example, shows a small section, and the viewers are expected to imagine who is behind the camera and the rest of the photographed scene.

● **Retrospective, Simultaneous** and **Prospective**: events are told in the present, past, or future.

● **Literal**: when the story explicitly addresses a particular subject; **Metaphorical**: when the story is a metaphor for some topic. This item is answered by observing the four dimensions of the narrative (spatial, temporal, mental, and pragmatic).

The topics: **external, fictional, representational, diegetic, autotelic, autonomous, scripted, receptive, determined, retrospective, literal** characterize a media with a high degree of narrativity, that is, the more of these items are identified in a media, it means that it presents a high degree of narrativity.

Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation

Another critical poetics in the analysis of Journey is remediation, which can be understood as representing an old media in the new media or as the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 2000). The concept of immediacy is related to immersion. When the receiver does not see the mediator, only the message is passed. In other words, the message is so close to the recipient that the medium or interface through which it is communicated is not perceptible. It is transparent. In cinema, the story involves the spectator who forgets that everything is being projected on a screen and that none is real. Thus, the movie screen becomes transparent. It is not perceived. **Hypermediation** is the opposite of immediacy. That is, the screen is explicit. The receiver sees and perceives the interface, not just the message, as he is called to see the medium through representation or interaction.

Thus, remediation is one of the essential poetics of digital media where interactivity is constant. Each time the user needs to choose an action, such as selecting a link, he leaves the immersion, the involvement with the content, to see the interface.

Depending on how the virtual space, also called the background, and the other elements that compose it in the foreground, are designed, it is possible to allow the user's agency when he navigates through these planes and dominates these spaces. The agency supports immediacy, but because it is an interactive process, there is also hypermediation. Thus, space is not only a means by which the user navigates through the elements, but it also produces meanings for him. The user interposes between the perception of space and its elements and immersion, that is, between immediacy and hypermediacy. Thus, both the space and the elements that compose it, the foreground and

background, directly interfere in the user's immersion, extending the understanding of remediation in the media (BOLTER; GRUSIN, 2000) to other items, such as the space itself and its elements (FADEL; BIZZOCCHI, 2019).

Agency

Agency is closely linked to 'being in control' and the power of choice that a media can offer the user. It is defined as "the satisfying power to take meaningful actions and see the results of our decisions and choices" (MURRAY, 1997, p. 126). Thus, a system can strengthen user agency through the perception of control in an iterative process (MURRAY, 1997).

For Eischner (2014), there are three modes of agency that are subdivided into certain specificities:

● **Personal**: it is perceived by the users when they can predict specific actions of a character or events in a narrative by knowing the genre of this narrative and mastering it. When it comes to a three-dimensional digital environment, which allows the user to move around, mastering space and mastering action are vital. In addition, different possibilities of choice provide that users master choice, so they perceive that the result was their doing.

● **Creative**: occurs when the user realizes that he can modify what was presented to him. Open-source software, for example, allows users to find gaps and make adaptations to them.

● **Collective** occurs when the user meets someone who has the necessary knowledge for a particular function or activity. This 'knowing someone' gives the individual the perception of collective agency.

Unlike Murray's (1997) understanding of agency, Eichner (2014) argues that agency is not limited to the user's possibilities of action but rather his involvement with the media. Therefore, Journey's analysis seeks to understand how narrative and remediation support agency.

Journey

Journey is a digital adventure game developed by *Thatgamecompany* and published in 2012 by Sony Interactive Entertainment LLC. It is about the journey of an indefinite being wearing a cape and a scarf, whose objective is to reach the top of a mountain.

The game's purpose is "to present a metaphor of a journey of a lifetime with the possibility of connecting with teammates along the way" (THATGAMECOMPANY, 2019). During the game, the player can interact with an anonymous companion. According to the Aurélio Dictionary of the Portuguese Language (2014), a companion can be understood as *"one who participates in the life or occupations of others; colleague, comrade: work, games, study companion."* On the other hand, a journey is defined as *"a journey, a journey that takes one day; travel of any length; work performed in a day"* (DICIONÁRIO AURÉLIO DA LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA, 2014). Thus, Journey seeks to provide the player with a differentiated gaming experience based on exploration and companionship, not scoring and competition among players (VICENTE; PIRES, 2018).

Journey features two modes of interaction. In single-player mode, as the name implies, the interaction occurs only between the player and the game system, without the presence of other players. In online mode, there is the possibility to interact with another player. Both modes do not influence gameplay, difficulty, or score.

No information that identifies the players is provided, and that is, it is played in the anonymous company. Also, the informational textual elements or communication among players and the system are absent except for the title 'Journey.' The title appears on the home screen with specific options and credits at the end of the game.

The only mode of communication between players is through the sounds that their avatars can emit when the controller's 'circle' button is pressed. When quickly pressing and releasing the button or pressing and holding it, the sound emitted is weak or strong (Figure 1), respectively. The latter is also a feature given by the game to activate and manipulate particular objects during the game.

Close Reading Method

This paper applied a close reading of the object, which implies its deconstruction through multiple readings to extract precise information, allowing for new connections of meanings and identification of concepts and messages not seen before in the first reading. Close Reading was extended beyond the field of literature, reaching new media (NORDEN, 1969) through the studies of Van Looy and Baetens (2003) and Bizzocchi (2003).

A digital game can also be understood as a type of text (FERNÁNDEZ-VALA, 2015) and as a medium (LUZ, 2009). Thus, this method can be applied to identify and relate the possible active poetics.
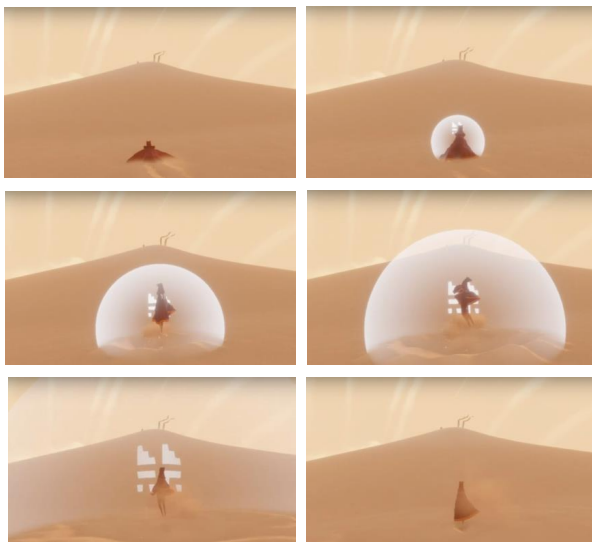

Figura 1: From top to bottom, from left to right - sequence of movements for loud sound (JOURNEY (BY THATGAMECOMPANY) - IOS FULL WALKTHROUGH GAMEPLAY, 2019).

For Journey's analysis, there were two initial readings to know the phases, resources, elements, and pathways. These interventions made it possible to specify the topics of investigation: navigation, companionship, and collection. Two dense readings of the object were performed for each subject, and the observations were noted in Table 1. Although each reading had a focus, the three topics evaluated were constantly revisited.

Research Topics:

● **Navigation** - these first two readings were intended to identify the difficulty in finding the path and identify the objects, sounds, or signs that the game presented to the player so that the way was quickly found. Mastering space requires the user to explore the space without getting lost, compromising the perception of agency. Thus, the first interaction was aimed at exploring space, avoiding following the path proposed by the game. In the second interaction, the proposed course was followed.

● **Companionship** - in the second readings, we sought to investigate the issue of cooperation to identify how leadership during the journey was offered and accepted. It was also observed at which times the player was followed and how this occurred. In the first interaction, the player followed the other player, and in the second, she sought to express that she was in control.

● **Collection** - in these last readings, the investigation took place on the game's collection objects. In the first interaction, all shiny things were collected. Differently, in the second interaction, no objects were collected to point out the impacts of collecting these objects on space navigation and the avatar's performance in the game's challenges (Table 1).

Results

The results obtained in each of the six interactions performed are presented below. For practical purposes, the avatar manipulated by the researcher will be presented in this paper as AP and the avatar controlled by the other player as AJ.

● Navigation – interactions take place in single-player mode, and we sought to explore the game world until finding the limits of the scenario to observe how the game would indicate that this was the right path or not. At first glance, there is no spatial limit. But, when approaching the boundaries of the game's area of action, the AP is pushed by a strong wind, indicating to the player that it should not follow that way (Figure 2). This is a way of not using so-called 'invisible barriers' to inform the player that he has reached the action limits of the game environment. These barriers negatively impact the player's immersion (ROGERS, 2013).

Furthermore, there is no indication of time or the avatar's health/life, allowing for a fearless and carefree interaction. Players can make the journey in the time they think is best, without being punished. It was also observed that the game does not have the function of pausing the interaction. Then pressing the options button (also used to pause in other games), the avatar just sits on the floor, so it does when there is no player action for a specific time (Figure 3).

There is the presence of non-playable characters in Journey who, at certain times, lift the avatar into the air and guide it, indicating the path to the player (Figure 4).

At each checkpoint, the camera moves to focus on the top of the mountain, reinforcing the goal of the journey (Figure 5).

Finally, before reaching the top of the mountain, where the game ended, the researcher tried to return, but it was only possible to return to the beginning of that *checkpoint*.

Table 1: Organization of analyzes and examples of collected data (the authors, 2020).

TOPIC	RESEARCH	READING	REMARKS
Navigation	a) Explore	1	The avatar was pushed into the game's playing area when there was an attempt to push the limits of the game's environment.
	b) Do not explore	2	Other characters showed the player which path she should follow.
Fellowship	a) Follow the other	3	The other player's avatar made sounds like an attempt to communicate with the researcher's avatar to follow him.
	b) Leading the other	4	The researcher's avatar made sounds like an attempt to communicate with the other player so that he could follow her.
Collection	a) Collect	5	The longer the scarf, the longer the avatar could fly.
	b) Do not collect	6	It was possible to perform all game activities even without the scarf or with its reduced size.

Figure 2: Top to Bottom, Left to Right – AP being pushed by a strong wind (Screenshot, 2019).

Figure 3: Left, the avatar in action. Right, the avatar after the player's period of inactivity or after pressing the 'options' button (Screenshot, 2019).
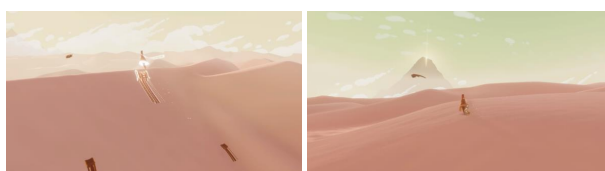

Figure 4: A character leads the avatar on the left and leads the way on the right (Screenshot, 2019).

Figure 5: Camera movement indicating the objective of the game (Screenshot, 2019).

It was observed that the game stimulates the exploration of the scenario and indicates to the player the path to be taken through the camera movements. The strong wind pushes the avatar when the player chooses the wrong way. Thus, the path was indicated but without interfering with the player's exploration process.

● **Fellowship** - the following two interactions took place in online game mode. It was observed that the interaction takes place in single-player mode from the beginning of the game until the second checkpoint. This strategy allows the player to understand the basic mechanics and dynamics of the game. When covering about 1/3 of the total game, the AJ joined the journey, and every action that the AP performed, the AJ did it spontaneously. When emitting sounds, for example, the AJ also emitted (Figure 6).

The sounds were used as a way of calling the other player to follow him. It was also used to indicate to the other the location of a shiny object. The sounds were emitted, simulating verbal communication. In the first interaction, where the AP was following the AJ, there was a moment when the researcher didn't move her avatar. After a brief time, AJ was different emitting sounds repeatedly as an attempt to call the AP to follow him, as when the AP approached AJ,

Figure 6: Top to Bottom, Left to Right – AP (left) and AJ (right) making sounds (screenshot, 2019).

the sounds stopped being emitted, and both went down the path together. "In the second interaction, the researcher should indicate to the other player that he should follow her." The other player showed resistance because, when making sounds, the AJ remained silent and continued to move without approaching or making sounds to the AP. After some time, the researcher went alone to the end of the game, as the other player abandoned the game.

Although it was not possible to lead the match in the second interaction, through these interactions, it was identified that companionship during the game does not occur for scoring interests or its benefits, as the game does not have any type of score or ranking of players. This lack of points and measurable information is one of the pillars that sustain the companionship that occurs along the journey together. Players seek to interact with the game with the other player regardless of whether the additional benefits themselves. There is a serious attempt at communication between players, even when silent, as this can be considered an answer. Trying to understand what the other means by the movements and sounds, or lack of them, heightens the perception of companionship. According to Paula and Hildebrand (2013, p. 108), "the lack of knowledge of the one who shares the session can be considered one of, but not the only, factors that contribute to the establishment of the emotional bond between the players."

● **Collection** - in the first interaction, we sought to collect all the shiny objects that increase the size of the avatar's scarf (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Avatar, left, and glowing object, right (screenshot, 2019).

It was observed that the longer the avatar's scarf, the longer it could fly. This action becomes a reward, as the avatar doesn't jump, just walks around the scene and emits sounds. In the second iteration, shiny objects were not collected. Still, after the first checkpoint, the avatar appears with a small scarf (see Figure 7).

We interpret this as a game system to compensate for the player's forgetfulness or inattention to not collecting the shiny objects during the first part of the interaction. Therefore, the researcher did not use the action of flying, simulating the absence of the scarf. It was found that it is possible to perform all the activities proposed by the game without flying.

At a certain point, the researcher allowed the enemy to attack the avatar (Figure 8). It was noticed that the scarf decreased in size with each attack. However, when the scarf was utterly lost, the enemy no longer attacked the avatar.

It was found that the scarf's size does not bring benefits or harm, nor points, because when you reach the end of the game when starting the climb up the mountain, the avatar's scarf disappears entirely regardless of its length.

After these last interactions, it was observed that collecting shiny objects is one of the activities within the game, but not the main one, as there is no score. So, the journey is the main objective of the game.

Figure 8: Avatar and the enemy in the background (screenshot, 2019).

Journey Narrative

Journey presents all the elements that characterize narrative, according to the four dimensions stipulated by Ryan (2006). Agents act in a specific space, delimited by the game system, and transformed over time. These transformations refer to different places agents are at both the beginning and the end of the game. These agents also react to events in the game. The player acts to influence an emergent narrative. Finally, the narrative is based on the metaphor of a lifetime journey, having a beginning that culminates in a particular end.

Table 2 resumes the analysis of Journey's degree of narrativity.

NARRATIVE MODE	DEFINITION
External	The game tells the story.
Fictional	The story is a metaphor for a journey.
Representational and Simulative	The *online* mode and the *single-player* mode can be considered images of the various possibilities of actions in the fictional (representational) world. These two game mode variations are productions of these different possibilities, which, in turn, are based on the combination of fixed and variable parameters.
Mimetics	The avatar tells the story.
Autotelic	The story is reported to the player and has no other purpose.
Illustrative	Images tell the story.
Scripted	The developers pre-set the script.
Participative	The game is a 'cool' medium. It has an end to the player's participation and extends the player's senses as it allows him to experience agency and fellowship with other players.
Determined	The game features all action points.
Simultaneous	Events are presented at the time they occur.
Metaphor	The game is a metaphor for a journey.

Table 2: Narrative modes identified in the game and their respective descriptions (the authors, 2020).

Final considerations

The close reading of the Journey game allowed us to identify the significant participation of space or environment in the player's performance. We argued that space in Journey goes beyond a metaphor of space as a medium (Fadel and Bizzocchi, 2019) to remedy the metaphor of character. Remediation is exemplified when the wind pulls the player and prevents him from advancing across the boundaries of the game. This metaphor embodies elements to help the player find his way.

The player perceives the "being" space as a character that shows him the way, the limits of the game environment, and where the avatar can act. The same behavior is assumed by the cloth creatures that lift the avatar into the air to guide it along the way, or when they make moves to get the player's attention, the camera movements used at each checkpoint remind the player of the game's objective: reach the top of the mountain.

Another aspect that reinforces this argument can be observed near the end of the game. The avatar starts climbing the mountain, which has a heavy snowfall, probably due to the altitude. It is no longer possible to discern the color of the cloak, which becomes covered with snow, and the scarf is gradually lost. Thus, the game environment may imply some fear in the player, as it turns out that all the effort to collect the shiny objects during the game is not relevant, but the journey itself.

The character metaphor emphasizes immersion, as the dialogue between player and space supports the navigation narrative. The player realizes that the environment is interactive and proactive, which is perceived as a manifestation of agency. On the other hand, the player's agency is promoted through mastering space. The player is asked to cross a three-dimensional digital space with few visual or sound elements that help this displacement.

According to Harari (2015, p. 58), the subconscious of human beings inhabits the world of the pre-agricultural era, when the human species depended on exploring the space and environments around it to find food pleasure. This is related to the aesthetic pleasure to which Murray (1997) refers that Journey is associated with the players' enjoyment of moving an avatar in a digital environment whose actions have meaning.

Thus, the player's immersion is shaped through the dialogue between the player and the space and mastering space. Unlike agency based on the mastering action, which implies hypermediation, mastering space requires immediacy, and that is, it requires transparency of the interface. Rogers (2013) highlights the negative impact on the player's immersion when so-called invisible barriers inform the player about the limits of action in-game environments. Journey does this creatively through the strong wind that pushes the player.

Finally, immersion underpins the transparency of the medium, which provokes the players' engagement. The game allows the journey to be shared with another player without positively or negatively interfering in its results. The player can feel immersed. As the narrative is built on space navigation, it's up to players to share the experience.

Unlike games that present a non-fiction universe, Journey offers an unknown environment and reality. According to Carvalho (2016, p.97), "walking in a routine place accommodates perception, while in different places we are obliged to be more attentive to what happens around." The author also reinforces that this unknown causes the player's interaction to be intensified.

Also, when the interaction occurs in online mode, players do not have any information about each other. However, both avatars are identical. In this context, "finding a peer brings comfort in the midst of the unknown, noticeable in the experience through recognition" (CARVALHO, 2016, p.97). It is possible, then, that mastering space, supported by the transparency of the medium, probably provides the action of companionship between the players. However, further investigations must be conducted to understand better the relationship between sharing the journey between players to share the game experience.

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