The Tragedy of Betrayal: How the design of *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus* elicits emotion

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ABSTRACT

Ico and *Shadow of the Colossus* are two games of high critical acclaim that are well known for their emotional affect – particularly because some of those emotions are unusual amongst digital games. Analysis of emotion in video games often focuses on narrative and representative elements, and emotions regularly experienced by gamers such as frustration, victory, joy of discovery etc. This paper uses close textual analysis with support from cognitive theories of emotion to analyse the ludic and mechanical, in addition to representative and narrative, qualities of these games. By doing so it is shown how guilt, grief and loneliness have more chance of being elicited from the player, with emphasis on the use of ambiguity and violation of player expectations. It is hoped that this approach will encourage further work of this type in an area so that both theoretical work and future development might benefit.

Keywords

Emotion, Ico, Shadow of the Colossus, alterbiography, ambiguity, guilt, videogames, cognitive theory

INTRODUCTION

Ico and *Shadow of the Colossus* (2006) (hereafter referred to as *SOTC*) are two games for the PlayStation 2 developed by Team ICO and published by Sony. *Ico* tells the story of a small boy who is imprisoned in a castle to die but then makes to escape with the help of a mysterious girl called Yorda. *SOTC* charts the progress of Wander as he makes a pact with a mysterious being known as Dormin and seeks out 16 giant creatures, known as colossi, spread across a secluded wasteland in exchange for the resurrection of his dead lover Mono.

Both games have received extensive critical acclaim and are often presented as examples of 'games as art'. Whereas many best-selling videogames (e.g. the *Call of Duty*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Grand Theft Auto* franchises) utilise power fantasies and elicit emotions and pleasures arising from the challenge-frustration-victory/'fiero' gameplay cycle (Lazzaro, 2004), *Ico* and *SOTC* are known for their ability to bring about catharsis in the player and elicit emotions unusual amongst digital games such as grief, guilt and loneliness.

Videogames players are often promised a sophisticated and wide-ranging emotional experience from their games, and yet many fall short of this aim. It is important that we explore how critically acclaimed games such as *Ico* and *SOTC* are able to achieve these

aims where other games seem to fail. In contrast to many other discussions where *Ico* and *SOTC* are mentioned in passing or as examples to support smaller points made in a broader discussion, this paper uses close textual analysis of the **whole** of both games to elucidate the various ways with which emotions are elicited from the player. Both games were developed by the same group and there are vague hints that they take place in the same universe, but there is no direct and strong evidence to prove that they are linked. One is not a direct sequel to the other and they are not part of a defined canon. For this reason, this paper chooses to study both titles as similar yet unconnected and separate titles.

The few other detailed analyses of these games have used psychoanalysis (McDonald, 2012), immersion (Davidson, 2011) or the theatrical concept of tragedy (Fortugno, 2009) to frame discussion. Even then, Davidson doesn't deal with *Ico* as a text in itself. Instead he recounts sections of *Ico*'s narrative to make a case for three phases of player experience (involvement, immersion and investment) – a discussion which is outside the scope of this paper. In any case, he clearly states that these stages are an attempt to form a 'semiotic framework' to discuss all games, as opposed to a detailed discussion about the intricacies of the player's experience of *Ico*. Herold (2009) gives a lively and emotive account of how it feels to play *Ico*, but fails to really deal with how the game makes him feel the way he does. McDonald's account is rooted in Melanie Klein's object relations theory and, whilst it is fascinating and does well to deliberately separate discussion of mechanics from representational aspects of *Ico*, the focus on the relationships between objects in the game, and the analogies with supposed subconscious 'phantasies' of the player (McDonald, 2012), means it doesn't clearly define what aspects of the game are the most emotive, nor what emotions are felt. Fortugno's excellent analysis of *SOTC* is concerned only with those aspects that arise from the inevitability and futility of Wander's quest and how the player plays their part in the tragedy that unfolds.

In contrast to the above, this paper takes a different approach – one with an emphasis on emotional engagement, supported by cognitive theory and on what aspects directly elicit emotion (particularly grief, guilt and loneliness) from the player.

The limitations of textual analysis, imported 'as-is' from literary theory, are well known (Carr, 2009). Yet too many other close readings unnecessarily emphasise audio-visual elements, characters or the narrative of a game with little regard for the act of gameplay itself, where it is situated within the reading of the text and how it synergises with the other elements of the game experience as a whole. This is an oversight and more close readings should take into account the unique ludic properties of games in addition to those aspects they share with other media. This paper will therefore examine elements of level design and mechanics, in addition to audio-visual representation and narrative, with a focus on the role of ambiguity and the betrayal of player expectations.

VISUALS AND CHARACTER

Both games display a striking graphical style characterised by heavy bloom lighting, high dynamic range and de-saturated colours, often evoking a sense of wonder in the player through aesthetic appreciation rather than 'technological astonishment' (Mactavish, 2002). The abstract art style doesn't distract the player with overt 'eye candy' and visual distractions seen in other games. Since a player can only concentrate on so many things at one time (Koster, 2005) this lack of graphical clutter and 'bells and whistles' (in contrast to the trend for highly-detailed and technically impressive hyper-realism in other 'triple-

A' titles) makes it easier for the player to think about aspects of the game other than the audio-visual spectacle on show.

Ico is approximately twelve years old and animated as such. He is small, weak, clumsy, stumbles as he runs around and up steps, has difficulty climbing ledges and lacks proficiency with the few weapons he has to use to fend off enemies. McDonald (2012) makes much of Ico's use of weapons throughout the game as a sign of his aggression and development, but when his only weapons until the final scene are a wooden stick and the occasional gunpowder jar bomb (which is never used against enemies but to remove obstacles) this can be a little difficult to agree with. He is vulnerable and has no special powers. A necessary pre-condition of emotional response is concern for an object, person or event (Ortney et al., 1990) and if what we see is related to survival then that heightens the emotional response (Grodal, 1999). McDonald positions Ico as showing aggression from the outset (emphasised by his horns and his supposedly 'maternal relationship to Yorda') (McDonald, 2012), but it is Ico's vulnerability – hinting that his chances of survival are slim at best, that encourages the player to feel protective and nurturing from the very outset before any of the narrative events of the game have been seen. This is in contrast to controlling a powerful and adept avatar such as Marcus Fenix in the *Gears of War* series, or Sam Gideon from *Vanquish*, who suggest no reason to have concern for their survival. Additionally, his childish nature makes good to harness our often-heightened concern for children – understandable, seeing as our brains have evolved as a tool for survival (Grodal, 1999).

Yorda – Ico's charge, who he must lead to safety over the course of the game, is similarly weak and vulnerable. She cannot climb tall ledges nor jump across large gaps in the game and stumbles more readily than even Ico does when moving around. She appears as a shy and insecure young girl, although her age is ambiguous. Yorda's incidental animations and behaviour suffuse her with personality - she steadfastly refuses to cross terrain that she deems too difficult when asked by the player and when left to her own devices wanders off and explores the surroundings. She is needy and requires constant surveillance – if she wanders off too far, the ghosts from the castle will appear and kidnap her before Ico can reach her. The protective concern that you feel for her is complemented by *Ico's* unique hand-holding mechanic – discussed below, and it is difficult to agree with McDonald that the relationship between Yorda and Ico is that of a mother-infant dynamic (McDonald, 2012).

In *SOTC* the player character is a little older (maybe in his late teens), better able to take care of himself and emotes far less than Ico ever does. Throughout *SOTC* he shows very little emotion either during cut-scenes or gameplay – no matter how dramatic the events, and this ambiguity and lack of emotion results in a form of 'blank canvas' effect. This makes it easier for the player to see themselves in Wanders movements and actions and to feel as him, rather than seeing the model of 'another', acting from a third-person cognitive stance and psychologically distancing themselves from his actions and control (McCloud, 1993).

Agro – the horse that Wander rides throughout *SOTC*, shows a great attention to detail similar to that seen for Yorda in *Ico*. She wanders around when not being ridden, although she ensures that she's fairly close to Wander in case she's needed. Her many incidental animations like shaking her mane, snorting and swaying or looking from side to side make her feel realistic. For both Yorda and Agro, these factors serve to give them their own personality and presence in their own right, rather than mere gameplay

accessories to the player. Yorda and Agro are the only other friendly beings encountered within their respective worlds, increasing the likelihood of emotional attachment by the player – they are all the player has and they share every aspect of their journey through the world. It is Yorda and Agro alone that the player can communicate with, interact with in a positive way and work with to progress through their respective games and this extra focus on the relationship, without competition from anything or anyone else, encourages a closer bond between player and partner.

The animation and models of the colossi inspire a palpable sense of awe and wonder. The majority of Colossi are slow-moving huge beings made of fur and stone that dwarf Wander, shaking the ground and throwing up dust and dirt as they move around to emphasise their scale and power. Wander has ample opportunity to interact with the colossus from near and far which emphasises the fact that they can be as much as thirty times the size of him. Every colossus is unique – they look, move and react to Wander's presence differently, giving each one the sense of being a real individual. The lack of all other sentient life (bar Agro) in the world of *SOTC* means they are all the more impressive, special and awe-inspiring. Not only does this make Wander look vulnerable in their enormous shadow, but it makes the task of defeating them a key site of emotional conflict; despite the great achievement and pride to be had in taking down such a large enemy, do you really want to destroy such a beautiful, peaceful and awe-inspiring creature? The personalities and behaviour of each colossus makes each one highly significant in the mind of the player, as opposed to the waves of near identical (and often dehumanised) enemies seen in other combat-orientated games such as 'splicers' in *Bioshock* or soldiers in the *Call of Duty* series; each one is a distinct individual and one of a small number of individuals in the barren landscape of *SOTC*. The majority of colossi will not attack Wander until he attacks them – implying that they are peaceful and wish him no harm. *SOTC* is making an appeal to our sense of morality – something that will be shared by most typical players (Carroll, 1999). Is defeating this opponent really going to be worth it? Is it the right thing to do? In doing so, the seeds of doubt about what amounts to 'progress' in *SOTC* have been sown – setting the mood and pre-criterial focus for the coming emotional experience when the colossi falls (Carroll, 1999, Smith G., 1999).

SOUND
"Of all the arts, music makes the most direct appeal to the emotions" (Bernstein, 1978).

Music and sound are key for the establishment of 'moods' (Smith, J. 1999) – defined here as cognitive states which predispose the player towards experiencing certain emotions linked to that mood, and to seek out audio-visual cues to perpetuate that mood (Smith, G. 1999). Sound also gives life to what might otherwise be a lifeless character (Cohen, 2000; Whalen, 2004); Ico and Yorda's sounds of effort and heavy breathing as they traverse the barren castle and Agro's snorting and whinnying across the deserted plains impart extra character to them and increases the players emotional engagement with their companions.

In Ico the only time that music appears (all non-diegetic) is during cut-scenes at the beginning and in the final moments of the game. For most of the game the only sounds are those made by Ico and Yorda, the sounds of enemies approaching and the ambient noise of the castle. Most of Ico takes place in large open spaces where there is the constant sound of howling wind and bird song. In the absence of any other background music, the player is subconsciously more aware of a **lack** of emotional cues, rather than their copious presence as might be seen in many other videogames. This conveys much of the feeling of loneliness and isolation to be found in Ico and since there are no other

people - Ico and Yorda speak different languages so there is no conversation – communication is with gestures and sounds only. This is an excellent example of affective congruence – where the (lack of) sound aligns with the ongoing narrative to heighten affect. Here the level design and narrative, combined with the sonic minimalism, effectively establishes a sparse mood that allows the player's imagination to contemplate and fully realise their diegetic isolation and drive home just how weak, vulnerable and dreadfully alone Ico and Yorda are.

In *SOTC,* whilst music is absent during travel from the main temple to the colossi, once a colossi is discovered various musical accompaniments are triggered. All are orchestral with prominent strings, in a minor key and of a gentle yet mournful quality. This stands in contrast to the rousing brass-heavy arrangements that players would be used to in other games (for example *God of War*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Mass Effect* etc.), as they approach and engage in combat. In those cases the game is (understandably) preparing the player emotionally for a heated encounter (combat) out of which they will emerge with a sense of victory/fiero and the music sets the mood of tension and adrenaline for the encounter and resolves the tension as the combat situation is completed. In *SOTC* however, this is not the case; the mood set is unusual, full of trepidation – as though the player should think twice about progressing any further with their actions.

As the player approaches and finds a way to climb the colossi there is a gentle track emphasising strings and woodwind which arouses interest and builds tension. Once aboard the colossi the music swells with flourishes of flute lines, prominent horns and swelling strings reminiscent of an action sequence in mainstream film, but the minor tonality still gives the sense of an impending tragedy rather than triumph. This difference in mood is important – narrative expectations allow events to be sequenced so that a regular 'downstream flow' of emotional events can be activated for optimal affect (Grodal, 1999) and this is what happens in most mainstream games. *SOTC* does the opposite – by setting an uncertain mood with the background music the player is already uneasy about what will happen next, and then *SOTC* directly violates those expectations.

As the final blow is delivered (with slow motion for emphasis) the music fades. In this moment of silence the player, after the struggle to mount, climb and defeat the colossus, is given opportunity to revel in their victory. This is replaced by a cut-scene of the fall of the colossus accompanied by deeply sorrowful female choral music with dark, low strings, such as one would hear in a requiem. The player, at the moment of victory, is forced to question what they have done. They have been robbed of their 'fiero' (Lazzaro, 2004) and they are 'told' by the music that they have done wrong and have killed something unique and beautiful. They are not a valiant hero on a quest to resurrect their love. They are, in essence, a murderer, and here *SOTC* shows how music can make a player reinterpret the visual and ludic information they receive (Cohen, 2000; Whalen, 2004) – if it weren't for the music, the player's sense of victory would be complete.

It is a rare example of a player being 'punished' emotionally for achieving an objective, and amounts to a betrayal of the players expectations of 'hard fun'(Lazzaro, 2004). The player feels the conflict between the ludic rewards and the emotional payback, and it is likely to elicit an emotion rarely felt in video games – guilt. Furthermore, Wander is pierced by black ribbons emanating from the fallen colossus (later revealed to be parts of Dormin's power), dies and is mysteriously regenerated back where he began his mission. The player is encouraged to consider the morality of their actions and whether the ludic rewards are indeed worth playing for.

As they set off towards the next target - in the barrenness of the wilderness - the player is left to reflect upon their actions. There is no music to accompany them on their search for each colossi and the player is left with the sound of the wind, Agro, and their own thoughts on what they have done, having had their pleasure of mastery (Fridja, 2002) tainted.

LEVEL DESIGN

The castle that Ico and Yorda must escape from appears as a single building where all areas are interwoven rather than a series of thematically related but spatially disconnected levels. Areas encountered later can been seen earlier on from a distance, walkways the player walked across previously can be seen from a different vantage point, often having been modified by the player's actions. This is a source of wonder, rediscovery and reflection at several points in the game which leads to a familiarity with the castle and stronger emotional connection to it (the 'exposure effect' – where emotions are more likely to be elicited if the stimulus is something that is familiar (Eysenck, 2010)). The castle moulds and contains Ico's journey from imprisonment through to Ico's loss of Yorda and battle with the evil Queen and so the narrative of the game is not only enacted through the events that take place in the castle, it becomes embedded in the actual game space as the player reflects on previous actions at that location (Jenkins, 2004).

The player is able to further speculate about, and emotionally invest in, the play space because of the ambiguity of the location - the player is never told how the castle came to be, who the queen is nor what purpose the castle serves. The castle is barren, yet the signs of the previous inhabitants are abundant in the form of railways, lifts, doors and graveyards. In the game's final cut-scene, where the castle caves in on itself and disappears into the ocean that surrounds it, the player is given a review of several locations of the castle in the process of collapse. The game has given the player opportunity for contemplation and imaginative reconstruction of what might have been, and this makes the castle into a character itself so that by the end of the game the collapse of the castle feels like the loss of an old friend. This increased personal investment on the part of the player increases the desire and expectation of an equivalent emotional return for that investment (described by Tan as 'Net Return' (Tan, 1996)) and this final cut-scene serves as a nostalgic trip through the games experiences as well as a tribute in memory of the castle as 'friend' with stirring music as accompaniment.

SOTC also takes place in a single vast landscape but there are many different areas and regions. During an introductory cut-scene this landscape is labelled as 'A Forbidden Land'. This narrative context enhances the feelings of loneliness and isolation for the player when combined with its vastness and the ruins of an ancient and unspecified civilisation strewn across the landscape. The player is not told of why this land is forbidden, nor of who lived there before or what happened to them. The ambiguity of the embedded narrative encourages the player to emotionally invest in the world through their curiosity and sense of mystery (Lazzaro, 2004) and time can easily be spent on 'paideaic exploration' (Callois, 1961) of the ruins for clues to the mystery in between searching for colossi. The more effort a player invests in becoming emotionally engaged in this way, the greater the emotional return at the appropriate time (Tan, 1996).

In both games long camera shots are used to show how small the player is compared to their environment. The player character also has a high level of freedom - any ledge can be fallen from, and there are a great many fatal accidents, missed jumps and long drops to

be had in both games. The precarious nature of the traversal of the environment complements the perpetual fear felt by the player in *Ico*, and increases the sense of achievement and, subsequently, the sense of betrayal and confusion felt by the player in *SOTC*. In *SOTC* the colossi are levels in and of themselves and whilst the player climbs and searches for weak spots the colossi move around the environment giving the player a strong sense of awe and vulnerability (particularly for the two colossi that fly). The juxtaposition of this appreciation for the colossi with the cut-scene of their downfall reinforces the feeling of guilt for the player - their actions having brought about the downfall of a majestic and awe-inspiring creature. The conflict between the player's desire (that of sparing the colossus) and narrative desire (that the colossi be killed in order to free Dormin and resurrect Mono) is compounded by the knowledge that defeating the colossi is the only way to progress in the game (Currie, 1999).

Illustration 1: Wander faces the 3rd Colossus in SOTC. Long shot is used to emphasise scale

Illustration 2: Wander approaches the entrance to a temple containing one of the colossi

Illustration 3: Ico perches on the edge of a ledge in the top center portion of the screen

Illustration 4: Long shot in Ico. Ico and Yorda can be seen in the foreground at the bottom of the image

MECHANICS

Much of *Ico* and *SOTC*'s story is told through mechanics – referred to by Calleja as 'entity alterbiography', (Calleja, 2009), where a story is built rather than told through a synthesis between rules, signs and the player. Increasing the player's involvement with the narrative leads to a unique emotional connection - the player experiences the story for themselves rather than be told it and their actions have a role in shaping the narrative. Perron, building upon Tan's notion of artefact (A) and fictional (F) emotions (Tan, 1996) has

suggested a third category – that of 'G' or 'game' emotions which arise from our actions in the game (Perron, 2005). However, these lack rigorous definition and it is not entirely clear where the dividing line between G-emotions and A/F-emotions (in the context of digital games) lies. It is suggested here that it is more helpful to think of the emotions that arise from the mechanics as 'alterbiographical emotions' – since these emotions arise from the micro-narratives players generate through their actions amongst the greater scripted narrative.
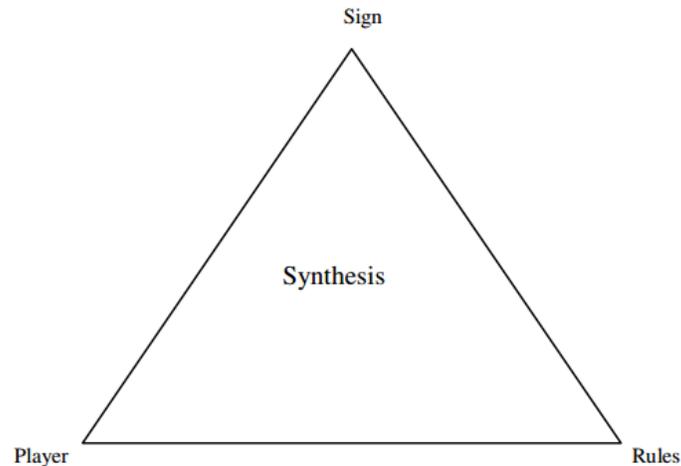

Figure 1: Calleja's concept of 'Synthesis in Game Environments' (Calleja, 2009)

In *Ico* the player is given a dedicated button for holding hands with Yorda. If this button isn't depressed or toggled, she won't hold hands and follow you. Other than moving, this is the single most used action throughout the game and lends support to the theory of emotions as 'action tendencies' and a games power to change them (Perron, 2005). The player must constantly approach her and actively lead her around the castle. There are ghosts that appear at regular intervals who attempt to capture Yorda and reclaim her for the Queen that Ico must fend off – if he doesn't then the game ends. The player's role as protector is quickly established and although these ghosts usually appear at scripted intervals during the game, they will also appear and snatch Yorda if the player wanders too far away from her for too long. The player must be constantly thinking of Yorda, especially when she is unseen or at a distance, in the same way that a responsible parent will maintain awareness of a small child. The emotional bond that this forms is strengthened by the mutual dependency that Ico and Yorda have. The player needs Yorda to open doors to progress and Yorda needs the player's protection and help to navigate the castle – despite Ico's own weakness. When Yorda is taken from the player later on in the game, the player has not only lost their key to escaping the castle, they have lost their only companion and the object of their protective affection. The sense of loss and failure is profound (Herold, 2009) and illustrates the strength of the fictional, procedural and metaphorical potentials of games **working together** to elicit emotion (Rusch, 2009).

There are few games involving 3D navigation where the player character doesn't automatically grab and hold onto a ledge when it is near, but in *SOTC* the player must make use of a button dedicated to grip. This is used to hold onto ledges when scaling buildings and to climb around the colossi. If the button is released then Wander will fall. The mechanic is a metaphor for the hero's clinging to hope for Mono's resurrection (Fortugno, 2009). Upon first contacting Dormin, he is warned that he will have to pay a

heavy price, to which Wander replies, "It doesn't matter". For him no price is too great. His tenacity/grip continues despite his bodily decomposition and his destruction of the seemingly innocent colossi. This grip transfers outside the diegesis to the player, who continues to play despite the potential feelings of guilt and loss, the betrayal of their expectations and their ambivalent emotional reward. Yet the player continues on with their task, despite an abundance of emotional cues warning them of the consequences of their actions – the foreboding music, the black lines and apparent death after slaying a colossus, the maniacal laughing of Dormin in your mind whilst you resurrect back at the temple at the centre of the world. Fictional, procedural and metaphorical elements align to amplify the emotional affect felt and imply that it is the player, rather than Wander, who cannot let go.

A button is dedicated to Agro - to call her and to kick her sides to move faster. The power of her emotive animations is strengthened through the nuances of her control; Agro frequently slows for no discernible reason, randomly changes direction, throws her head back and forth and refuses to attempt difficult obstacles. She is not always an easy figure to control and the player must learn to accept these idiosyncrasies. This makes Agro feel like a character in her own right and more than just a vehicle for transportation. Whilst approaching the final colossus a bridge collapses under Agro and she falls into an abyss whilst ensuring that Wander is safe by throwing them to the other side of the chasm. The player is faced with the loss of their only companion and left alone with the consequences of their actions. Guilt, sorrow and grief are prominent at this point – the player feels attachment not only because she is a useful object of traversal, but because throughout the course of the game they have developed a relationship with her as a person. In the framework of Ortney et al., fortunes-of-others (focusing on events happening to others), attraction (focusing on objects) and attribution (focusing on other agents) emotions combine for powerful emotional affect (Ortney et al., 1990).

FINAL MOMENTS
The end of *Ico* brings further twists in the narrative, such as Yorda arising in a dark form, carrying the unconscious Ico to a boat and pushing him out to sea as the castle caves in on itself. The player still wishes for escape from the castle with Yorda – this has been the object of the entire game and for her to have come so far and then help you escape whilst remaining within the collapsing castle appears unjust. The player's expectations of being able to escape the castle with their charge remain unfulfilled and the player is prompted to feel grief and failure. After the credits have finished rolling the player is able to control Ico, who finds himself washed up on a beach. He discovers Yorda, apparently fully human, further up the beach. The surge of hope and joy elicited contrasts strongly with any grief, failure and loss that may have been experienced during the previous cut-scene. This hope, however, is tainted with caution – it is unclear whether this really is Yorda, their location remains unknown and there is a suggestion that it may all be just a dream. Nevertheless, whilst it is often important that the story meshes with the concerns and sympathies of the audience (Tan, 1996; Grodal, 1999), this is an example of how events that run **counter** to the audience's beliefs and desires can elicit just as much, if not more affect than those that run parallel (Gaut, 1999).

An equally emotional and conflicting climax occurs in *SOTC* after the final colossus is defeated. Villagers from Wander's home in pursuit of Wander finally arrive to find his body returned by Dormin's power to the temple. Contrary to many games where progress in marked by 'levelling up' or an increase in power, skills and actions of the playable character (and in narrative heavy games, a development of character), *SOTC* again defies

player expectations. Over the course of the game Wander's appearance has gradually degraded as more colossi have been conquered - his skin has turned white, his hair turned black, he's developed black disease-like marks on his skin and his clothes are dirty - clearly an external manifestation of the deteriorating state of his soul. There is no powerful fully-levelled-up character to take onto the final triumphant battle here, just a visual reminder of your, at best, questionable actions.

The final stages of Wander's possession by Dormin are shown where Dormin manifests as a demon using Wander's body and grows to fill the cavern. The player then takes control of Wander-as-Dormin as he fights against the villagers who are determined to defeat him. However, it is a battle that the player cannot win; in the same way that the colossi were huge and powerful, but slow moving and unable to fend off the quick and nimble Wander, Wander-as-Dormin is too sluggish and cumbersome to deal with the villagers. The player has an opportunity to empathise with the colossi that they have spent hours despatching – a point pressed further by the recapitulation of the music that accompanied Wander's efforts to fell the colossi, now accompanying the villagers as they try to take down Wander-as-Dormin.

Eventually the villagers cast a spell to vanquish Dormin and the demon begins to disappear into a vortex at the back of the temple, leaving behind Wander's body which the player now takes control of as they fight to not be sucked into the vortex. This is also a battle that the player cannot win, however much they cling to the rocks and ledges in the temple, and Wander's disappearance into the vortex is inevitable even as he strains for one last time towards Mono. This ending frames the entire narrative as a classical tragedy, as the player comes to realise the inevitability of their death and downfall that has been alluded to throughout the course of the game (Fortugno, 2009).

Mono's unbreakable grip on attempting resurrecting his love regardless of cost – his vital character flaw - has brought him to a predictable and unavoidable end despite early warning signs from Dormin and the condition of his body. For emphasis, the music that accompanied the fall of each colossi plays as you attempt to escape the vortex - a leitmotif to identify the player's fate with those of the colossi they have spent so much effort defeating. The final cut-scene outlines another ambiguous ending with the resurrection of Mono, the survival of Agro (albeit with a limp) and a baby boy with horns (presumed to be Wander) found where the vortex was previously. They ascend the temple to a secret garden teeming with life, their fate uncertain but providing a shred of hope to the player that their efforts were not completely in vain.

At several points throughout both games the experiential and explicit narratives complement each other and enhance the emotional involvement of the player, providing evidence that the most reward can be had when they are combined (Brown, 2007). Moreover, both endings provide evidence that when the qualities of representation are ambiguous the synthesis between rules, representation and player imagination is most apparent and active due to the player's imagination playing a larger role in the synthesis of alterbiography (Calleja 2009). The potential for emotional involvement is at its highest – the player's increased effort in understanding the diegesis is repaid with a greater emotional return.

CONCLUSION
Both games use ambiguity as a tool to arouse curiosity and mystery leading to greater player involvement in the synthesis of entity alterbiography. The player is encouraged to

build an emotional and caring relationship with their companion AI through their animations, sounds and control mechanics that is cruelly shattered when both are taken from them. The sound design, whether it is *Ico's* emptiness or the barrenness of the Forbidden Land contrasted with the soundtrack to the fall of the colossi in *SOTC*, is emotionally manipulative and more than just an aural complement to on-screen action.

Player expectations are violated on a number of occasions. Ico and Wander not the product of a 'typical gamer's power-fantasy' - they never develop or improve, and both games lead the player to believe that, although they completed the objectives set before them, they actually failed. This is particularly clear in *SOTC* from the death of the first colossi onwards, culminating in the tragic inevitability of Wander's demise. The ambiguous endings contradict psychological conditioning where the player has traditionally been rewarded by games for doing what is asked of them and these unexpected events have a deep emotional impact on the player.

Team ICO games have the potential to elicit strong emotional responses. One way to understand how they do this is to use cognitive theories of emotion to elucidate elements of the player's interaction with a game, which this author strongly believes shows great promise for guiding future discussion. To the best of the author's knowledge, application of these theories to the domain of games is still relatively new and there remains a wealth of exciting new territory to explore and discover. It is therefore suggested that further close textual analyses of other games would help provide the foundations for building new knowledge in this area as well as more detailed exploration and application of cognitive theories of emotion (for example those of Nico Fridja (2007), Paul Ekman (1992), Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (2001), or Lisa Feldman Barret (2006)) to the medium of videogames.

Ico and *SOTC* are strong examples of the emotional repertoire and power digital games can have when there is a symbiosis between mechanics, explicit narrative and representation and why, with further development, they have the potential to provide rich emotional experiences that are different to other media. It is important that more work is done to uncover and examine these elements at work in the outstanding texts that achieve this, both from a point of view of theory informing design and of good design practice informing and shaping theory. If digital games are to mature and develop to the point where they are regarded as having artistic merit on a par with other forms of popular media then we must pay closer attention to games that aspire to broaden and deepen our emotional experience during play.

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