

Animal Crossing **as an Interactive Narrative Machine**

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Introduction

I'd like to tell you about some dear friends of mine. I chat with them, give them presents and write them letters, or take care of their little chores. I listen to their problems, stories and opinions. They're as interested in me as I am in them. They're friendly, charming and funny. Their quirky personalities make me laugh. I visit them almost daily. When I can't catch up with them for a day, I miss them. What a friendship that is! I wonder what they're up to right now? *Hazel*, the cute squirrel, who likes to drink her coffee black; *Monique*, the snobby cat, who wants to become a drummer; or *Cyrano*, the cranky anteater, who considers me his only friend!

I might add that these friends are *virtual*, having an imagined existence only. They're the cute inhabitants of a town in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, which I play almost every day—in order to see what's going on in the wacky lives of my animal friends. Moreover, I tell other real-life friends—luckily, I have some of those, too—about the fictional events depicted in the game. “*You know what Monique did today?*”, I'd say, and then go on to recount what happened in the virtual town of *Animal Crossing*. That is, the fictional events generated by my playing *Animal Crossing* spark the production of little *narratives*.

In this paper, I suggest that reflecting on such or relevantly similar experiences points towards a way of resolving the conceptual tension between a key feature of many modern videogames, namely their allowing for genuine *freedom in play*—specifically, their allowing for freedom in generating *fictions*—, and videogames' potential of providing *engaging and meaningful narratives* in a distinctive way. This might seem odd, as *Animal Crossing* isn't typically mentioned in the same breath as a game like *The Last of Us*, for example, which impressively demonstrates how stories can be told through videogames. Yet I claim that *Animal Crossing* reveals videogames' potential of allowing for genuine *freedom* in generating narratives just as, or perhaps even more distinctively than such a heavily plot-driven exemplar. In particular, I introduce, motivate and explain the concept of an *Interactive Narrative Machine (INM)*, of which *Animal Crossing* can be regarded as an instance.

A videogame can be regarded as an INM if its playthroughs generate *narratives*. A narrative, one might say, provides a viewpoint that guides one's appreciation and interpretation of temporally arranged and causally connected events "chosen for their contribution to an unfolding plot with a beginning, middle, and end" (Tavinor 2009a: 111). For INMs allowing for freedom in generating narratives, it might thus be expected that their players should be able to generate different narratives by selecting different fictional events that contribute to different such unfolding plots. Understood like this, INMs face a dilemma, however (Tavinor 2009a: 114): Either the player is free in generating fictions, in which case the INM seems to fail in terms of its *narrative* possibilities, or the player can generate different narratives in the above sense, which requires the sacrifice of many of the INMs *fictional* possibilities.

Motivated by my experiences with *Animal Crossing*, I show, in this paper, how a player's ability to generate different fictions can be reconciled with the presence of a narrative thread (in *some* sense). In particular, I propose that we needn't suppose that INMs must provide different but dense *plots*, but, instead, that a way out of the dilemma might be tied to the thought that, in individuating different narratives, we can acknowledge different players' different *fiction-directed emotions*. Hence, in order to account for freely generatable narratives, I propose that we shouldn't merely look at what the screen shows, but at what's going on within the *player* of an INM, too.

I proceed as follows. Since the nature of videogames feeds into my concept of an INM and thus, ultimately, into my solution for the fiction vs narrative dilemma, I explain, first, what *videogames* are (following Lopes 2009). Second, I narrow down the *videogame* concept to that of an *Interactive Fiction Machine (IFM)* (relying on Walton 1990). Third, I narrow down the *IFM* concept to that of an *INM*. Finally, I propose that the fiction vs narrative dilemma can be resolved by understanding the narratives that INMs allow for as those that can be generated by freely feeling what are fictionally emotions (backed up by Fludernik 2010).

Videogames

First, I pin down what videogames are. My proposal mixes Grant Tavinor's (Tavinor 2009a: 26) and Dominic Lopes' proposals (Lopes 2009: 107) with my own additions and alterations.¹

(VG) *A whatchamacallit's* a videogame if and only if

¹ Conditions 1, 2, 3 and 4 are Lopes'. Condition 1.1 is Tavinor's. Condition 1.2 differs from Tavinor's proposal in that I'm leaving aside that videogames can be based on *interactive* fiction. Finally, I'm turning Tavinor's condition 3.2 into one describing not *videogames*, but only their *displays*.

- (1) it's a game²
 - (1.1) that's based on rules and objective gameplay *or*
 - (1.2) that's based on fiction *and*
- (2) it's run on a computer *and*
- (3) it's interactive, with displays that are (or would be)
 - (3.1) generated by the player in real-time *and*
 - (3.2) consisting (partly) of moving images on a digital screen *and*
- (4) it's interactive *because* it's run on a computer.

Conditions 2 through 4 capture videogames' ontology. According to Lopes, videogames form a subclass of *computer works*. Hence, in what follows, I apply Lopes' ontology of computer works (Lopes 2009: 21-84) to videogames.

In playing a videogame, I first appreciate *my* playthrough and the *display* that's thereby generated. Every artwork has some kind of display, which is "the structured entity that results from the artist's creativity and that we tune into when we appreciate the work" (Lopes, 2009, 4). What's interesting about videogames is that their displays are *variable*, depending on each player's inputs. If *n* people read a novel, then each of them will appreciate the same display, namely "a sequence of sentences that tells a story" (Lopes 2009: 4). If *n* people play a videogame, however, then, most probably, no two of them will appreciate the same display.

A videogame's display is generated by a playthrough, which is, in part, the sum of a player's actions while manipulating an input device. So videogames are interactive in the sense that they prescribe their players to have a direct impact on their displays. It's important to highlight that videogames *prescribe* such interaction. In contrast, if I read a novel's chapters in the reverse order, this doesn't count as *interaction* with the novel, as, first, the novel didn't prescribe my partaking in the generating of that display (cf. Lopes 2009: 38f.) and, second, if what I've generated is a display at all, it's the display of a different (newly discovered or created) novel. Videogames, on the other hand, don't turn into different works as soon as one of its possible displays is generated. The possibility of players' generating displays with different features is built into a *single* work: the videogame.

² Of course, *game* is the prototypic concept that resists definition in terms of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions (cf. Weitz 1956: 30f.). However, nothing of this sort is required here, as Tavinor's definition can be used to spell out what kind of games videogames (typically) are (cf. Tavinor 2009a: 86). *Qua* disjunctive condition, condition 1 is fulfilled if at least one of its subconditions is fulfilled (cf. Tavinor 2009a: 86). Since all videogames include rules and objective gameplay in *some* sense—as players can never do something in a videogame that the underlying computational process doesn't allow for—, subcondition 1.1 is to be understood narrowly, capturing videogames that provide players with rather clear-cut sets of rules and objectives. The puzzle game *Tetris*, for example, fulfils subcondition 1.1, but not 1.2. Videogames that are exclusively fictions lack such funneling rules and explicit objectives: In *Animal Crossing*, the player just lets the player-character *live* in the game's colourful world by letting him talk to neighbours, redecorate his house or go fishing, for example. Finally, *BioShock*, for example, fulfils both disjuncts.

Given the player's inputs, a videogame's display output is, in part, a visual representation of a game on a screen (cf. Tavinor 2009a: 26ff.).³ A *computational process*, i.e., the following of formal rules and algorithms, is responsible for the transition of player inputs into display outputs (Lopes 2009: 48) in real-time (cf. Tavinor 2009b: 94).

So as a videogame player, I generate a display. The videogame itself, however, is not only something over and above *my* display, but also something over and above all displays that were and will ever be generated. A videogame isn't the sum of its player-generated displays. Instead, a videogame is the work that's appreciated while the player appreciates *her* generated display as one among many possible displays of *that* videogame (cf. Lopes 2009: 59). Moreover, a player not only appreciates her generated display as a whole, against the background of other possible whole displays, but also appreciates *partial* displays in a similar manner. So by appreciating both videogames' player-generated whole and partial displays as some among many others, players appreciate the videogame as a whole, and thereby the computational process that underlies its possible displays, i.e. the "set-up as generating those alternatives" (Lopes 2009: 60). Hence, full appreciation of a videogame at least requires lengthy sessions of play, whereby the player generates a range of partial displays, or even repeated playthroughs, whereby the player generates a range of whole displays—depending on the complexity of the videogame in question (cf. Lopes 2009: 60ff.) and the player's degree of generative freedom.

By generating different displays, then, players *explore* videogames (Tavinor 2009a: 97), as computational processes turn players' inputs, i.e. their explorative actions that constitute playthroughs, into display outputs. In addition, *appreciative* players reflect on the nature of their generated displays, and the playthroughs that led to these, as few among the many possibilities the videogame allows for. It's only by consciously thinking about a videogames' *other* possible displays, and about how *their* interactions and the resulting displays relate to these, that the player can really understand and appreciate the videogame *qua* single, coherent work (cf. Lopes 2009: 92).

Given this account of videogames, I can focus on a specific type of videogames—individuated by the nature of their *displays*—in the following section.

³ Most modern videogames also employ sounds and haptic elements. Henceforth, talk of screen representations is meant to include these elements (when present).

Interactive Fiction Machines

In theorising about videogames, Tavinor illustratively employs the term “fiction machine”: “Modern videogames are fiction machines, buffering a fictional world into which the player can step to play a game” (Tavinor, 2009b, 94). In this section, I elaborate on this idea:

(IFM) A videogame is an Interactive Fiction Machine (IFM) iff its displays are fictions.

A videogame’s display consists of, or at least includes, moving images on a screen. In the case of IFMs, these images represent imaginary states of affairs. Hence, IFMs’ displays are, or at least include, fictions, which are “representational artifacts that depict situations with an imagined existence only” (Tavinor 2009a: 38). IFMs both prescribe their players to imagine that something is the case as well as to generate fictions themselves, or, one might say, to *unravel* fictions through their actions—as the possible fictions are, in some sense, there, ready to explore, in the IFM. Hence, players aren’t able to generate just any fictional states of affairs, but only those that are allowed for by the IFM. Each player selects fictional states of affairs from a range of possibilities and thus partly determines what an IFM’s display represents.

The concept of an IFM isn’t the same as the concept of an *interactive fiction*. In explaining the fictive nature of (some) videogames, Tavinor claims that

filmic content is acted on in much the same way as videogame content is acted on; the difference is exactly when it is acted on in the two cases and by whom. In the former, the interaction occurs during the process of production of the fictive artifact by actors, writers, and directors, in the latter, during the audience’s engagement with the fictive artifact. (Tavinor 2009a: 46)

This claim needs clarification: Unlike filmmakers, who generate a film’s *only* display and, hence, the film as a whole, a videogame (IFM) player generates only *one* of the videogame’s (IFM’s) *possible* displays, and not the *videogame (IFM)* as a whole.⁴ Not *IFMs*, but its *displays* are fictions, because only these depict situations with an imagined existence only. Talk of videogames as “interactive fictions” (Tavinor 2009a: 53) conceptually blurs this distinction. Let me reinforce this point by drawing on Kendall Walton’s theory of fiction (Walton 1990).

According to Walton, propositions which are true of, for example, a novel or film, are *fictional* (Walton, 1990, 35). A proposition that’s true of an IFM *isn’t* fictional, however. For example, it isn’t possible to say of *Animal Crossing* that

(1) The player-character talked to Monique

⁴ Of course, a videogame player might generate more than one of the videogame’s possible displays. But even if she generated thousands of the videogame’s displays, she’d never thereby generate the videogame itself.

is fictional, as it's only fictional of some *displays*. *My* generated display, for example, makes it fictional that *my* player-character talked to Monique (cf. Walton 1990: 38). It's possible, though, to say of *Animal Crossing* that

(2) The player-character talked to Monique in Daniel's display

is *true*. This isn't a *fictional* proposition, though, but a true proposition about an IFM—which is the work over and above any particular generated fictions. Hence, it's not the case that “[w]hen appreciators interact with videogame fictions [...] the *work* is only rendered after the game has been played” (Tavinor 2009a: 57, emphasis added), as the *work* has been there all along. Instead, it's *one* fiction that's rendered after the game has been played. The IFM is the pool of options available for generating fictions. It's this pool that's appreciated when we appreciate an IFM.

So given that an IFM is the pool of options available to the player, into which she can tap in order to freely unravel fictions, we can ask what exactly this pool consists in—and, hence, what might constitute individual fictions. In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, for example, players

can spend their time driving taxis for cash, flying aircraft, skydiving, mountain biking, exploring the large wilderness areas, interacting with pedestrians, going on dates, shooting pigeons, swimming in the sea, playing basketball, and even fictionally playing classic arcade videogames. (Tavinor 2009a: 53)

Since most IFMs turn player inputs into display outputs in real-time, players can generate fictions similarly as they'd engage in spontaneous imaginations, during which “fantasizing minds stray, seemingly at random, without conscious direction” (Walton 1990: 14). IFMs' fictions aren't generally of this kind, though. If, in an *Animal Crossing* fiction, the player-character bumps into Monique, the *player* must *decide* which fiction to generate: one that represents the player-character as helping Monique with one of her little chores or one that represents the player-character as ignoring her request. However, the resulting screen image represents *only* this: the player-character's helping or the player-character's ignoring Monique. This doesn't reflect the way in which the fiction was generated, though, as what the player *does*, *decides* and *feels* is, somehow, an essential *part* of the generated fiction. So an IFM's display doesn't *equal* the sequence of screen images. But then what *else* does an IFM's display consist in?

In order to explain IFMs tight player-display connection, I employ Walton's distinction between two kinds of fictional worlds (Walton 1990: 58), which can be regarded as classes of fictional propositions (Walton 1990: 66):⁵ While a *screen world* includes the propositions fictional of the

⁵ The kinds of fictional worlds are renamed here, as Walton's labels are misleading when applied to videogames.

sequence of *screen* images generated by playing an IFM, a *make-believe world* includes the propositions fictional of the game of make-believe that one plays by interacting with an IFM.

Each IFM's display's sequence of screen images generates different fictional propositions, and thus a different screen world. Here's a fictional proposition generated by my *Animal Crossing* display's sequence of screen images:

(3) The player-controlled character helped Monique.

So (3) is part of my screen world. Yet it's not part of my screen world that *I* felt so-and-so while playing a game of make-believe by interacting with *Animal Crossing*. That's part of my make-believe world. In contrast to playing a game of make-believe by looking at a painting, where propositions fictional of the make-believe world don't change the painting's "screen" (= canvas) world (Walton 1990: 59), while playing a game of make-believe by interacting with an IFM, propositions fictional of the make-believe world *can* change the subsequently generated screen world. Hence, "the [make-believe] world effectively *projects* into the [screen] world" (Tavinor 2009a: 57).

Specifically, in interacting with an IFM, one can engage in *self-imaginings*, which Walton calls instances of "imagining *de se*" (Walton 1990: 29). If one imagines something from the inside, as "*doing* or *experiencing* something (or *being* a certain way)" (Walton 1990: 29), then one necessarily imagines something *about oneself* (Walton 1990: 90). For example, if I imagine wandering around my town in *Animal Crossing*, then I'm necessarily imagining *of myself* that I'm wandering around the town. Hence, by imagining *de se*, one generates fictional propositions *about oneself*. Imagining *de se* while interacting with an IFM means that the player can "illustrate for herself what she imagines [the player-character] to experience, by imagining experiencing it herself" (Walton 1990: 33f.). One can thus imagine to experience what one makes the player-character do in the fiction (as represented on the screen) oneself, which can influence the subsequently generated portion of the fiction substantially—in particular, if imagining *de se* leads to experiences of what are fictionally emotions.

Let me illustrate: *Animal Crossing*'s quirky animals have an imagined existence only. Still, it seems as if I've been friends with them, although I don't believe that they exist. Yet the belief that oneself is actually *liked*—which only existing creatures can—is a necessary condition for someone to be in a genuine relation of friendship with someone else. But why should I evaluate Monique as liking myself, if she doesn't exist? And why aren't I motivated to hug her, even if my mental state feels like the mental state of being sympathetic to someone? What does it mean to say that I'm sympathetic to Monique?

In accordance with Walton 1978, whose account of fiction grounds the remainder of this section, I claim that in cases of being sympathetic to Monique, I'm not *really* sympathetic to someone, but only *quasi*-sympathetic. To be quasi-sympathetic is to be in a psychological state that's very similar to that of being genuinely sympathetic to someone—maybe even indistinguishable from it. Still, I'm not genuinely sympathetic to Monique, because I lack the necessary belief that I'm being liked by Monique. Also, if I were genuinely sympathetic to Monique, I'd have the inclination to get up from the couch in order to hug her. In contrast, my smiling when Monique approaches the player-character is a non-deliberate and automatic action, caused by my experience of being quasi-sympathetic. Moreover, I neither feel sympathetic to an existing *counterparts* of Monique, nor to her *representation*. If anything, they feel sympathetic to *Monique!* Or don't I?

According to Walton, I don't. Clearly, it's fictional of my *screen world* that Monique likes the player-character. But since I, as a player, can imagine of myself that I'm part of the fiction, I can imagine of myself that I'm being liked by Monique. This imagining is only fictional of the game of make-believe I play by interacting with the IFM, though. Hence, it's fictional of the *make-believe world* that

- (4) I myself am liked by Monique,
- (5) I myself believe to be liked by Monique,
- (6) I myself have the inclination to hug Monique.

Now I, as a player, *actually* know that (4), (5) and (6) are fictional. This knowledge results in my state of being quasi-sympathetic. Hence, these three fictional propositions, together with my actual belief in their fictionality, cause certain sensations—that feel like those I have when I'm genuinely sympathetic to someone—which, in turn, make it fictional of the same make-believe world that

- (7) I myself am sympathetic to Monique.

So this fictional proposition is generated by my imagining *de se*, which generates certain fictional propositions about myself, by my actual *realisation* that these propositions are fictional and, as a result of my actual belief in the fictionality of these propositions, by my *feeling* of being quasi-sympathetic. Nevertheless, I'm disposed to characterise myself as being sympathetic to Monique as soon as I feel certain sensations while interacting with *Animal Crossing*. I might not know that, *actually*, I'm merely in a state that's *fictionally* the state of being sympathetic to Monique.

While interacting with IFMs, I can thus *actually feel* quasi-sympathetic, which doesn't amount to my actually being in the state of feeling sympathetic to a fictional character, but to my actually be-

ing in a state that's *fictionally* the state of feeling sympathetic to a fictional character. These real experiences generate fictional truths about themselves, namely that they're—fictionally—experiences of being sympathetic to a fictional character. Thus, it actually, and often vividly, feels just *as if* I myself am actually in a state of being sympathetic to Monique. Walton claims that “we *extend* ourselves to [the fiction's] level” (Walton 1978: 23). Were it not for my input, the generated fiction wouldn't establish the same screen world, which results partly from my quasi-emotions—which are fictionally emotions—while interacting with the IFM. Hence, while interacting with an IFM, my state of mind not only supplements the generated fiction, but *partly* constitutes it as well. So given that IFMs' displays are fictions, we must, for some IFMs at least, look not only at what's happening on the screen, but also at what's happening within the player.

Given the preceding account of IFMs, I can focus on a specific type of IFM—individuated by the nature of their *fictions*—in the following section.

Interactive Narrative Machines

Tavinor claims that “in a significant departure from how narratives are depicted in traditional fictions, in videogames the player often adopts a role within the narrative” (Tavinor 2009a: 110). In this section, I explain how this can be understood by focusing on IFMs that incorporate narratives into their generatable fictions.

(INM) An IFM is an *Interactive Narrative Machine (INM)* iff its displays are narratives.

A narrative, one might say, provides a viewpoint that guides one's appreciation and interpretation of temporally arranged and causally connected events “chosen for their contribution to *an unfolding plot with a beginning, middle, and end*” (Tavinor 2009a: 111, emphasis added). Hence, since the notion of a well-ordered and causally tight *plot* seems tied to what a narrative is (Wilson 2003: 394), it seems natural to expect that INM players can generate *different* narratives by selecting different fictional events which contribute to different such unfolding plots.

Understood like this, INMs face an inherent problem, however (Tavinor 2009a: 114): Either the player has much freedom in generating fictions, in which case the INM seems to fail in terms of its *narrative* possibilities—for how can the fictional events represented by each of these very different fictions contribute to an unfolding plot?—, or the player can generate narratives in this sense, which requires the sacrifice of many of the INMs *fictional* possibilities. This dilemma is nicely illustrated by many INMs' reliance on non-interactive movie sequences (cut-scenes) that interrupt the interactive gameplay in order to secure narrative progress: Different players are forced to follow the same narrative, no matter how they inter-

act with the INM (Tavinor 2009a: 119). In fact, as Tavinor notes, “the narrative in many videogames seems merely an afterthought” (Tavinor 2009a: 115).

Can this design problem be overcome in some way, i.e., can the possibility of generating different narratives be squared with the player’s ability to generate different fictions? Tavinor mentions five artistic strategies that might be utilised (Tavinor 2009a: 120ff.): (i) integration of narrative-relevant events into interactive sections; (ii) personalisation of the narrative by letting players choose some of the player-character’s properties or the order in which to tackle narrative episodes; (iii) integration of narratives of discovery, which require the player(-character) to reconstruct the setting’s nature and history; (iv) integration of narrative-inducing branches, which allow for different paths the narrative can take—depending on the player’s choices; (v) implementation of narratives that are algorithmically computed from players’ inputs.

Strategies (i), (ii) and (iii) don’t dissolve the dilemma, however: in case (i), the interactive sections into which narrative-relevant events are integrated are nevertheless tightly scripted; in case (ii), the individual episodic narratives are the same for each player—and without different overarching narratives, this doesn’t amount to genuine narrative variety; in case (iii), both the narrative *of* discovery, as well as the *discovered* (intradiegetic) narrative (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 95), are the same for each player.

Of the above strategies, (iv) and (v) are much better situated within Lopes’ framework. Especially (v) marks the peak of what INMs *could* achieve; as yet, no INM allows for its players to generate narratives in this strong sense, though. Anyhow, fully maxed out, this strategy might result in another problem: an INM that allows for *complete* freedom in generating narratives, without *any* guidance in terms of what kinds of narratives are possible, wouldn’t be a *single, coherent work* that can be appreciated, evaluated and interpreted at all. It’s true of *individual* narratives that

[c]lose control over fictive events aids the ability to sustain narratives that are carefully paced, and develop in a set order. [...] [T]his linearity seems to give rise to the normativity of interpretation: why [...] we can inquire into which interpretation of the plot of the game is the correct one (Tavinor 2009a: 119)

Yet an INM’s success *qua* INM demands much more: What’s appreciated, evaluated and interpreted isn’t *the* plot, which can be correctly interpreted, but the extent to which the INM allows for *different* narratives to be generated, which contribute to the INM’s meaning as a whole, despite—or rather, in virtue of—their differences.

Hence, of the above strategies, (iv) currently seems most promising: Players’ choices in generating fictions lead to different narrative paths, including different cut-scenes and the narrowing or broadening of possibilities in terms of fictional events that might result from these choices. INMs incorporating this strategy often have multiple endings. Yet there are only as many different narra-

tive paths as the designers deliberately and explicitly choose to integrate, all of which depend on the player's choices at selected junctures. Also, these junctures are few (Tavinor 2009a: 126f.). Hence, the narrative vs fiction dilemma isn't quite resolved even by strategy (iv).

Does that mean that the concept of an INM is incoherent? Not if we analyse it slightly differently. Specifically, I propose that we adopt a different view of the concept of a *narrative* or, at least, regard it as a cluster concept. Hence, a way out of the dilemma might result from regarding narratives differently than in terms of incorporating tight unfolding *plots*. INMs, then, needn't provide different but dense plots for the player to generate, but something else—which might also be subsumed under the concept of a narrative.

Generally, narratives require that the events depicted are in some sense meaningful. According to George Wilson,

[n]arratives assign meaning or significance to the events they incorporate by situating them within an explanatory pattern that typically delineates both their causal roles and their teleological contributions to the needs and goals of the characters. They provide a global account of dramatically highlighted behaviour by specifying salient causes of the agents' actions and by charting some of the consequences that those actions engender. (Wilson 2003: 394)

I propose that these conditions are fulfilled in the case of INMs' fictions that depend, in part, on the sets of *experiences which are fictionally emotions* they prescribe. If the player herself is, make-believedly, a character of the fiction—or thinks, feels and decides for the player-character—, then the incorporated events are situated within an explanatory pattern that delineates their causal roles and teleological contributions to the needs and goals of *that* character. The salient causes of the agents' actions originate in the player herself. The engendered consequences of these actions are thus, certainly, dramatically highlighted, as the player herself has caused them.

In order to back up this proposal from a narratological angle, a look at Monika Fludernik's narrative theory is instructive.⁶ Fludernik regards producing (conversational) narratives as something we *naturally* do. But we don't produce narratives as involving the succession of events, each of which has an explanatory significance and contributes to a well-structured plot, but rather as involving—and transmitting—an individual point of view that's tied to a subjective experience. We might say that in producing conversational narratives, event reports are typically conveyed with an “emotional edge” (Fludernik 2009: 108).

Now, according to Fludernik, the prototypical kind of *narrative in general* in general is *conversational narrative* in the above sense. Hence, Fludernik proposes that the concept of a nar-

⁶ For an overview, see Fludernik 2010: 122; for the English translation, see Fludernik 2009: 108-9; and for the comprehensive theory, see Fludernik 1996.

rative shouldn't depend on involving any kind of *plot*. Instead, narratives essentially involve the representation—and transmission—of what she calls “experientiality”. The human experience includes actions, intentions and emotions. Narratives provide reports and evaluations not only of events as they can be objectively observed and described from a consciousness-external standpoint, but also—and crucially—of *individual human actions*, which result from intentions and feelings, *and the intentions and feelings themselves*. *Experientiality* is necessarily connected to an agent's consciousness—insofar as it's filtered through it—and thus incorporates the “what it's like” aspect of her actions, intentions and emotions. Hence, a narrative can be regarded as a *subjective* representation of events, representing not what *historiographers* would represent, i.e., successions of objectively individuated events, but representing events as filtered through someone's consciousness, i.e., as experienced, emotionally assessed and evaluated by an agent. Moreover, Fludernik claims that, given some text, narrativity, thus understood, isn't just present or absent. Instead, narrativity is recognised or, in some cases, projected onto the text by its readers.

So a narrative, according to Fludernik, involves the transmission of how someone *felt* in a certain situation. Of course, there's a continuum between the telling of the succession of events and the transmission of an experience in full, including its “what it's like” aspect. Some narratives made possible by INMs, however, come close to the ideal of transmitting this aspect of an experience so that the player can fully understand and appreciate it. It follows that the INM player, who generates a narrative in this sense, is and can be its *only* narratee, as only she recognises, while playing, the experiences that are fictionally emotions called for by the narrative. Interacting with an INM is a personalised experience, which is reflected in the way the narratives take shape.

Conclusion

I conclude by looking at what the above proposal makes of *Animal Crossing*. While it's certainly an IFM, we might still wonder whether it's also an INM.

Clearly, *Animal Crossing* isn't an INM if by “narrative” one means something that depends on a tight *plot*, as the events visually represented by *Animal Crossing*—which amount to nothing more than seemingly mundane actions like chatting to neighbours, going fishing, catching insects or buying new furniture, for example—surely aren't what epic plot-dependent narratives are made of. Instead, *Animal Crossing* provides the player with complete freedom in generating a fictional life among talkative and mostly friendly animals.

Nevertheless, *Animal Crossing* is different from IFMs representing fictional car races, for example, insofar as, in playing *Animal Crossing*, I can, and regularly do, experience what are

fictionally *emotions* towards my animal buddies. Specifically, I fictionally *act* within the world of *Animal Crossing*, fictionally *intend* to help Monique and others, and fictionally *feel* sympathetic towards them when they fictionally tell me about what's going on in their lives. I've actually developed certain feelings which can *fictionally* be regarded feelings of *friendship* towards Monique and her lively neighbours. So in playing *Animal Crossing*, and in telling some of my real-life friends about what fictionally happens in the world of *Animal Crossing*, seemingly non-plot-worthy events are being filtered through my consciousness, whereby certain experiences that are fictionally emotions are highlighted and which can thus be regarded as narratively significant.

Generally, an INM's appreciation involves not only the player's generating narratives that facilitate interpretative payoffs, but also her reflection on the kinds of narratives that the INM, as a whole, allows for (cf. Lopes 10: 95). As an appreciative *Animal Crossing* player, this would mean to be willing to reflect on my experiences *and* to ask myself what other possible experiences the game might provide. Hence, in playing *Animal Crossing qua* INM appreciatively, I must emotionally assess and evaluate my experiences—which are fictionally emotions—such that a coherent picture emerges not only of *my* experiences, but also of the experiences *Animal Crossing*, as a whole, generally prescribes its players to have. This leads to my individuating the *kinds* of narratives *Animal Crossing*, as a whole, allows for. For example, by playing *Animal Crossing*, I've (fictionally, at least) learned how it feels like to live in a friendly neighbourhood in which everyone knows and cares for everyone else—which is an overarching narrative thread instantiated by all individual and subjective *Animal Crossing* narratives.

Hence, *Animal Crossing* can be regarded as an *Interactive Narrative Machine*. We've reached this conclusion by explicating the nature of videogames. This explication revealed that videogames essentially involve player-generated displays. However, such displays aren't simply to be identified with what's represented on the *screen* while playing a videogame, but, in some cases, include what's going on within the *player*. Specifically, experiences that are fictionally emotions not only supplement videogame displays that are fictions, but also influence them. In such cases, many of the fictional events represented on the screen would not have been generated were it not for the player's experiences that are fictionally emotions. Hence, these experiences might be regarded as *parts* of the generated fictions and thus as parts of such videogames' *displays*. Such fictions, i.e., fictions that include what's represented on the screen *and* what's going on within the player, can, moreover, plausibly be regarded as freely generatable *narratives* in the case of videogames that provide many possibilities in terms of generating fictions, but few (or none) in terms of generating tight and meaningful *plots*. This proposal eases the conceptual tension between fictive freedom and narrative freedom in videogame design and appreciation. However, it isn't an *ad hoc* manoeuvre introduced only to dissolve a dilemma, but also gains plausibility insofar as it's in line with a general narrative theory, according to which the trans-

mission of *experientiality* is essential to the production of narratives—and not the unrolling of a tight and meaningful plot.

So all in all, this conceptual reorientation might pave the way for understanding—and for designing—ways in which videogame players' freedom in generating fictions and their freedom in generating narratives can be aligned.⁷

Games

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF. Nintendo, 3DS, 2013.

BIO SHOCK. 2K Games, PC/Mac/PS3/Xbox 360, 2007.

TETRIS. The Tetris Company, multiple platforms, 1984-2014.

THE LAST OF US. Sony Computer Entertainment. PS3, 2013.

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⁷ One might focus on narratives that transmit the experience of very specific emotions, feelings or attitudes. Here are two examples: First, in Milne 2012 and Milne 2013, I've argued how players can develop what are fictionally *immoral* attitudes by playing *BioShock*—and thereby generate and appreciate artistically valuable narratives. Second, in Tavinor 2009b, Tavinor can be understood as arguing that *BioShock* lets players experience what's fictionally another specific feeling, namely that of *being free*—even if they're in fact channeled through a pre-determined plot-path. Moreover, if playing *BioShock* gives rise to such an experience, a player might also fictionally develop an awareness of her own freedom as an autonomous agent. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that such special experiences might be among those that can be transmitted by videogame narratives.

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