

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

Underlying much of this thesis are ways in which games can communicate information to players. This is precisely why the procedural enthymeme is so helpful a tool to apply in pursuit of those methods. It permits the developers to communicate the large amounts of information needed to effectively interact with their product without any need for the kinds of extensive manuals that used to be provided alongside a hard copy of a new game. With the rise of online video game outlets and the industry's mounting need to make gameplay materials accessible digitally, such long-form guides have become obsolete. Without the ability to directly convey basic controls, game-specific mechanics, effective strategies, and other helpful information to new users, more modern developers had to adapt their approach. Some redirected their efforts towards low-stakes tutorial sections and on-screen button-prompts, while those with games that were less mechanically intense found that they were in possession of the freedom to subtly nudge their players toward where they wanted them to go.

This is one of the main differences to be found between Giant Sparrow's two existing games. *The Unfinished Swan* has quite a few mechanics and controls that need to be communicated to the player, so it is much more liberal with explicit instructions. Meanwhile, *What Remains of Edith Finch* keeps its gameplay quite stripped-back and can therefore play with creative ways to communicate what is expected of the person playing, making it an ideal candidate for enthymematic discussion. It is beholden to many of the same control standards as other games in its genre, relying heavily on one's existing knowledge of how to operate in a

digital environment; it is an apt demonstration of how a variety of visual methods can be used, in league with procedural enthymeme, to indicate importance, directionality, space, and function; and it expands the visual into the temporal, presenting players with technologies from the past and asking that they decipher the controls from a practical understanding of how that technology works in real life. Moreover, this game shows how each enthymematic form, given the same exact premises, can yield ideological and narrative conclusions in addition to the technical procedures that they construct, similar to how Bogost argues that these models sometimes reinforce the ideologies of the people who design them. *What Remains of Edith Finch* is a game with narrative threads that span not only many years but also various theoretical approaches. These enthymematic frameworks, no matter how elementary their impacts, all have a lot to contribute to how the game functions and to how its functioning allows the many stories of the Finch family's misadventures to leave the emotional impacts that the developers intended.

### **Procedural Rhetoric and Interactional Enthymemes**

Breaking down *What Remains of Edith Finch* to its most basic mechanical elements is one way to begin unraveling some of its nuanced and extensive usages of enthymematic theory. Without simple movements like walking up a flight of stairs or opening doors, the game would no longer be interactive; it would not be able to convey the same ideas to the player because they would have no control over their actions, however limited that control is over the actual story. Procedural enthymemes constantly give players an idea of what is expected of them to function within their digital environment and access more of the game's narrative. A fundamental procedure in *What Remains of Edith Finch* is the understanding that, in order to progress through the story, one must seek out the protagonist's commentary. Each piece of required monologue guides the player to the next, leading them through the environment. The order in which these

pieces of commentary are found can vary at times, but this is not to say that there is no intended order that players are encouraged to follow. Furthermore, there is a certain line of commentary that can only be accessed sequentially, one that forms the main narrative of the game. Mostly, these are Edith's responses to her surroundings and not intentionally activated by the player. The game itself takes the shape of a single sequential line that spans multiple areas and has many other, less strictly organized elements hovering just outside of it that the player can explore in whatever order they wish. In the interest of brevity, I will be borrowing the idea of the Stanley Parable Adventure Line™ (Adventure Line) from Galactic Cafe's *The Stanley Parable* which refers to much the same principle and provides me with existing language to describe it as it applies to *What Remains of Edith Finch*. In the first few minutes of the game, after the player's perspective has shifted from sitting on a barge – while inhabiting the point-of-view of the person later revealed to be Edith's son, Christopher – to Edith's perspective as she stands just inside the chain-link fence that marks the boundary of her family's property, the Adventure Line is as follows:

- 1) Edith comments that she lived in the house until she was 11 years old,
- 2) She states that she has not been back since her brother Lewis's funeral,
- 3) She speculates about her mother's intentions in leaving behind a key in her will with no stated purpose,
- 4) As she approaches the house, she talks about how her relationship with it has evolved over time,
- 5) And, when she crawls through the doggy-door to the left of the garage, she notes that it was much easier to do so when she was 11 years old.

There are numerous pieces of commentary that Edith gives during this section, but only these five events are invariably necessary and must occur in a single order, making them part of the Adventure Line. Between numbers three and four, the player must walk down a hill towards the Finch home, but they have a choice of two roads to get there and each has its own commentary. As such, neither is part of the Adventure Line even though one of them must play for Edith to reach the front of the house. Between four and five, there are several things that the player can look at that will prompt Edith to give her thoughts on them, but one can also walk directly to the doggy door without interacting with any of them. So, those pieces of monologue are not on the Adventure Line. The game makes it clear early on that the Adventure Line exists and must be followed to progress, but it does not always make the path clear or obvious. Enthymematically, players are supplied with two premises, “Edith will comment on many of the things she looks at and/or interacts with” and “Some of those things permit her to move on,” thus leading them to the procedural conclusion that “I need to look at and interact with more things to find the ones that let Edith move on.” This is how *What Remains of Edith Finch* trains players to both make their way through the game effectively and also seek out more information about their environment; success and progression have been mechanically tied to the search for more knowledge.

The gameplay expectation that players will know to pursue the Adventure Line by interacting with their environment and letting Edith give her thoughts is, itself, entirely contained within *What Remains of Edith Finch*. It does not require outside information because it is specifically tailored to function within this game, although the general approach is not unique to it and has been used in similar ways before. The same can be said of the procedural enthymemes that players are asked to fulfill, especially those that seem simple and thus appear in many other

games, or even most of them. Since this concept of procedural rhetoric, as constructed by Bogost, is based on a traditionally truncated model of the enthymeme, it does have some interesting implications surrounding interactionality, something that the author touches on rather extensively as an important and often undervalued part of digital rhetoric at large (42). Fredal also discusses this quality and understands the 3.0 truncated enthymeme's interactional nature as the ability of audiences to provide their own outside information in the fulfillment of the enthymeme's conclusion, or even the argument's necessitation of existing knowledge to some extent. Not only does this mean the person could possess opinions and views contrary to those of the rhetor but also that they may altogether lack the required information to complete the enthymeme.

A truncated 3.0 enthymeme that is comprised of one stated premise (This character is a witch), an unstated premise (Witches are evil), and an unstated conclusion (This character is evil) relies upon the person interacting with it to believe that witches are evil for them to arrive at the same conclusion as the rhetor. In this way, their variation in opinion can lead them to a different conclusion altogether. If audiences disagree with this belief and are aware that the rhetor is attempting to play off of it, then they are more likely to be annoyed by the enthymeme's implications instead of persuaded. Alternatively, a person who lacks an understanding of what a witch is and has no definitive opinion about them may not be able to fulfil the enthymeme in any way, positive or negative. Indeed, they may not identify that there is a conclusion to be reached in the first place. This is frequently the case with children who have yet to absorb a social and cultural concept of religion, accepting the stated premise that the character is a witch without attributing any moral qualities to them. Fredal presents this as a rather concerning element of how truncated enthymemes function, going as far as to say that one reason why they consider 3.0

to be a flawed model is that “audiences don’t process syllogisms very well” (47-48). It is true that many enthymemes can fall prey to such disconnects between rhetor and audience. However, the interactionalist approach that Fredal describes can also generate useful insights into how individuals’ experiences change their readings of the information given to them, or how they do not. This theory is especially applicable to video game mechanics and the varying levels of familiarity required to immediately utilize them effectively.

Functionally, *What Remains of Edith Finch* is a rather simple game given its lack of combat. Players’ options are usually limited to movement and occasionally interacting with objects as a way of prompting Edith to remark upon them. However basic these mechanics are, they do largely rely on the player having some level of familiarity with video game controls. For instance, most keyboard-based games use the same layout, referred to as WASD and depicted in Figure 2.1, for moving through the environment. As the name indicates, the player’s left hand is intended to be positioned so that their



Figure 2.1. WASD Keyboard Layout

fingers rest on the W key which moves their character forward or up, the A key which moves them to the left, the S key which moves them backward or down, and the D key which moves them to the right. In games like *What Remains of Edith Finch* that use a first-person perspective, moving the camera is reserved for the mouse as it replicates the movement of the player-character’s head. As the description of the W and S keys’ usual functions might indicate, the exact action caused by the player’s use of any given key varies from game to game, but the

standardization of control layouts makes it all too easy to predict based on the product's genre. This is largely where interactionist enthymematic theory becomes relevant to procedural rhetoric in that a person who is unfamiliar with video games in general may well have trouble jumping into a game and immediately using the controls well enough to succeed.

Things like movement controls have been standard for some time, and as such most players are familiar with the WASD layout or similar controller-specific parallels. However, the genre of a game can change how those layouts work. One of the more obvious cases is in the difference between first-person games like *What Remains of Edith Finch* and side-scrolling



Figure 2.2. *Hollow Knight*

platformers like Team Cherry's *Hollow Knight*, seen in Figure 2.2.

Side-scrolling games (side-scrollers) generally use two-dimensional environments where the player can use the keyboard to move up with W, down with S, and

side to side with A and D respectively. In this case, moving up translates to either jumping or climbing something. In other three-dimensional games like *What Remains of Edith Finch*, the player can move forward, backward, left, and right using the WASD keys because they are maneuvering in three dimensions but jumping and climbing are usually assigned to other keys like the spacebar. Overall, the layout of side-scrollers bears more resemblance to older games that use the four arrow keys to enable the same types of movement mechanics.

Even between genres, a person with more experience playing three-dimensional games where one can move around freely might take some time to fully adjust to playing in a limited

side-scrolling format and vice versa. However, while discussing procedural rhetoric and how it constructs procedural tropes, Bogost notes that it is the tendency of human beings to identify those parts of game designs that remain relatively standard. More abstractly, the understanding that a player's physical processes translate to on-screen processes is imminently transferable, regardless of genre (Bogost 14). The procedural ability of video games to construct intertextual trends is indispensable, but it often only applies to simplistic elements like those that have already been discussed. Even Bogost's examples included things like using keystrokes to do specific things and understanding typical procedures for saving one's progress in a game so that it is not lost when the program is closed (13). For controls that are slightly more complicated, such as interacting with objects and moving through spaces that may not at first seem navigable, developers can find significant assistance in designing something intuitive if they rely on other enthymematic theories in conjunction with procedural rhetoric.

### **Visual Enthymemes**

Procedural enthymemes can be based on much more than existing knowledge and basic controls. One may know how to move with WASD and jump using space, but a game still has to tell its user where to go. It would be difficult for the player to maneuver about their environment, finding all of the proper objects to interact with, if the game did not make points of interest stand out visually in some way. This can be accomplished using many different methods, from relying on contrasting colors as an indication of importance to adding effects such as a glow or icon. Some video games have come up with memorable and even iconic ways of doing this; *The Last*



*of Us Part II* employs the same visual cues as its predecessor, marking collectables and crafting materials with a small white glint of light that turns into an icon indicating what it is when the player gets close, as in Figure 2.3. *The Stanley Parable*'s own Stanley Parable Adventure Line™ acts as a visual aid, seen in the following Figure 2.4, and keeps players moving in the direction that the narrator wants them to go. *What Remains of Edith Finch* is no different, having engineered some visual enthymemes that



Figure 2.3. *The Last of Us Part II* Collectibles



Figure 2.4. The Stanley Parable Adventure Line™

act as premises for their procedural cousins in a way that efficiently ferries the player through the environment.

Before delving too deeply into the particulars of the visual enthymeme's usage in video games, it is important to mention that visual and procedural enthymematic theories are notably derived from different branches of study. While Bogost does not explicitly state a departure from Aristotelean theory in its purest form, his writings on procedural rhetoric draw primarily from the more widely used 3.0 model which, as discussed in Chapter One, views an enthymeme as a syllogistic argument wherein one or more elements have been left unstated (18). Valerie Smith, on the other hand, attempts to construct a theoretical framework surrounding enthymemes in visual media, finds that an earlier 2.0 model, based heavily on Aristotle's original work, is more useful for this line of inquiry. 2.0 enthymematic theory does not require any part of the argument to be left out; in other words, it does not rely on truncation for something to qualify as an

enthymeme rather than a syllogism (Smith 116). Instead, this classical form asks only that the argument be based on probability and consensus while involving the subjective experiences of both rhetor and audience.

Aristotelean 2.0 enthymemes frequently function using commonplaces, a concept detailed in Chapter One amid discussion of Grimwood's work on madness in video games. Commonplaces are, according to Smith, things that are mostly agreed upon inside of a distinct cultural space (121). This does not mean that they have to be unanimously accepted, only that there is a high likelihood that a person occupying that cultural space will agree with or at least understand it. Smith believes these to be foundational to the use of enthymematic rhetoric in visual argumentation because they establish what an audience will see as probable within a classical enthymeme. For a visual argument to use a symbolic visual cue that will resonate with viewers, there must have already been a societal or cultural commonplace that dictates the generally accepted meaning of that symbol. This is particularly important from a procedural standpoint because a visual cue that asks a person to physically do something must be seen, interpreted correctly, and then translated into an appropriate action on the part of the viewer.

*What Remains of Edith Finch* takes a few approaches to visually constructing procedures, depending upon the specific circumstances. The most direct among them is the use of small white icons that appear when the player gets close enough to interact with an object, similar to those used in *The Last of Us Part II* and its predecessor. In *What Remains of Edith Finch*, these can look like a small hand, speech bubble, or book (see Figure 2.5). Each symbol is indicative of generally what will happen when an object is interacted with, and they rely on players being able to recognize them. The hand symbol typically means that something can be physically interacted

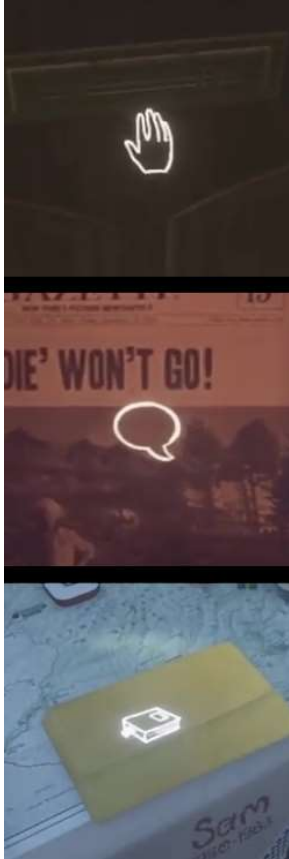


Figure 2.5. Hand, Speech Bubble, and Book Icons

with, whether it is being moved, opened, activated, etc. Speech bubbles are signs that Edith has something to say about a particular thing, but her monologue will not begin until the player has interacted with it. The book symbol is more specific and, unsurprisingly, used less often as a result. It tells the player that they can read the associated piece of written media. The first time the book symbol comes up is in the first scene, before the player has been introduced to Edith at all, and hints at the fact that they can open the journal that Christopher is holding. The book icon's introduction happening so early does help new players learn how it works since they see it immediately and have no alternative to interacting with it, and it seems to also signal the narrative importance of the journal itself as the same book Edith carries with her to document her family's stories. Icons like these do not explicitly state what

interacting with an object will do, but they do help the player to make an informed guess when they first encounter the symbols. Recognizing the interactive icons in *What Remains of Edith Finch* is fairly easy and it does not take long for most people to catch on to them. Still, their ability to briefly convey a probable meaning makes that learning process far quicker and smoother for first-time players.

When it comes to navigating one's surroundings, these icons are also instrumental in directing the player's focus appropriately and making sure that they do not miss key pieces of information. Perhaps most important to this function is how the icons change depending upon the player's distance from their objects. If one is looking at a part of the house from some distance away, such as first walking into the main foyer, then they are likely to be completely invisible. It

is only after one has started approaching them that they appear in the form of small white dots, devoid of their more complex symbolic meaning. When the player is close enough to interact with the object, the dot transforms into one of the three symbols.

This shift can be seen in Figure 2.6 wherein the player approaches the Finches' mailbox. A distance-based change allows the game to do several things at once; the environment is not overly cluttered with symbols that have



Figure 2.6. Approaching the Finches' Mailbox

not yet become relevant, players notice the small white dots first which encourages them to investigate their surroundings to find out what awaits them, and the symbols give them a general idea of what they have found. It is easy for one to find themselves seeking out these little dots, being drawn in their direction and subsequently led through the house.

These symbols, according to Smith's definition, can be seen as visual cues that play on cultural commonplaces because they are symbols that most people, even those unfamiliar with video games, will be able to pick up on when interacting with the game. However, they are also commonplaces within the specific cultural space of video gaming because symbols like them, small shiny dots in particular, have become extremely recognizable as a sign that something can be interacted with. *The Last of Us Part II* has already shown that this is an intertextual trend, and it is joined by countless other games like the 2018 reboot of Santa Monica Studio's *God of War*. As such, they are an effective visual premise in the construction of a procedural enthymeme.

Their meaning is based on the consensus between creator and audience, but the player's knowledge of what will happen when one interacts with them is purely probable; if a speech bubble appears while approaching an object, then a player who is new to the game should still be able to surmise that triggering it will most likely cause someone to say something because a speech bubble commonly means that a person is talking or can be talked to.

There are innumerable other, more widespread applications of commonplaces that one can point to in the context of Smith's visual enthymematic theory. Certain colors have cultural significance, and so their use can have probable meaning. For instance, red is used in many Western cultures as a universal negative; road signs that ask drivers on the road to stop are almost always red, a red light on a piece of electronics usually means that something is wrong, extremely angry people are sometimes described as seeing red, and evil characters in films are frequently associated with the color red. Similarly, contrasting the size of two things can have probable meaning because of commonplaces indicating importance and power; films are sometimes shot such that one person in a frame appears larger than another, arguing through the use of visual enthymemes that the bigger-looking person holds more power in the situation. Even something that is not a commonplace can use other, smaller ones to elicit an intended response from viewers because the ability to recognize and react appropriately to commonplaces is so ingrained in people's minds.

One of the biggest things that makes *What Remains of Edith Finch* memorable, setting it apart from others in its genre, is how it uses floating text to deliver textual information while informing physical space in incredibly effective ways. It may seem at first that the floating text is only present as clever subtitling for the main character's thoughts, but it plays many more roles than that; the text's proximity to other things can visually indicate importance and its movement

while exiting the scene can guide the player to where they need to go. Because Edith's commentary is what defines the Adventure Line (or linear core narrative) of the story, the physical presence of her words in the world does the same thing in a visual sense. One of the earlier examples of this is when Edith approaches the open door to Walter's room and her commentary appears on the opposite wall, encouraging players to come inside and look around. If they do, they will be greeted almost immediately by another piece of commentary where the text is positioned right next to the locked copy of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne. This book is not visible from outside of the room, so the first piece of commentary brings players closer, lining them up for the next. The rest of the Adventure Line proceeds in much the same way, although the floating text is still used in the other optional game segments.

Creating a proverbial trail of breadcrumbs through the Finch house is one of several things that floating text is used for in *What Remains of Edith Finch*. It also quite handily gives developers a way of adjusting the player's attention when the subject is difficult to see or easily missed. A great example of this is when Edith talks about how Edie could always see the top of the old Finch house sticking out of the water at low tide. While it seems like an odd statement, it

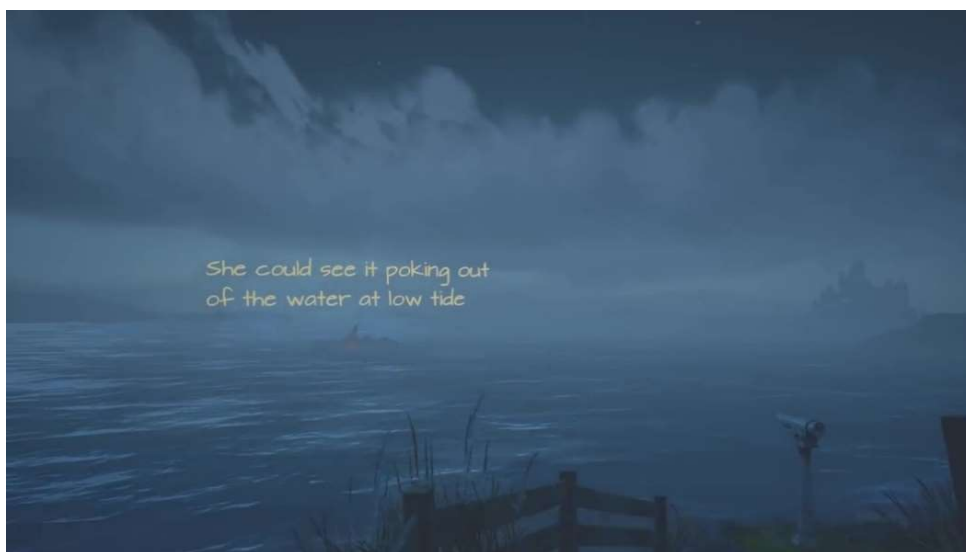


Figure 2.7. The Old Finch House

is established earlier in the game that Edie's father, Odin Finch, had attempted to sail the house from his home country of Norway in 1937.

Odin was sadly caught in a storm while at sea and the house wrecked off the coast of the State of Washington, just in view of where Edie's husband, Sven, would later build their new home. As a result, most of the old house remains underwater with only the tallest point of the roof sticking out when the sea-level goes down. Looking out over the ocean, one can actually see the top of the house when Edith mentions it, but it is dark and difficult to isolate (see Figure 2.7). To draw the player's eye there, the floating text is made to appear smaller and further away than it normally does. This way, the text implies directionality as well as physical distance. It is capable, however, of doing the same with the addition of movement, as seen in Molly's vignette.

Over the course of Molly's story, an incredibly surreal part of the gameplay, one sees through her eyes as she takes the form of several different animals, each under the player's control. At one point, she transforms into an owl and begins hunting small animals in a field. Because the camera is so high above the ground, it is nearly impossible to actually notice movement in the grass, making it difficult for players to complete the task of finding and catching their prey. The small subtitle that appears whenever Molly has identified an animal is excellently placed such that it draws the eye down to them and then shows generally in what direction it is moving so that the player is better equipped to intercept it. From a procedural angle, the enthymeme being presented is comprised of two premises, one of which they have already derived from a far more elementary enthymeme; it is understood that progression is only accomplishable by following the text that appears during gameplay, the player is further supplied with the premise that there is visibly distant text below them in quite specific locations, and they are expected to conclude that the text hovering close to the ground is probably an indicator of where to dive down. The game's visual design thus enables players to conclude the appropriate physical response to the task they have been assigned.

Symbols and floating text are great ways for *What Remains of Edith Finch* to guide the player on a larger scale. The game automates some actions so that the player only needs to continue moving forward to complete them, crawling through tight spaces being one that comes up occasionally. Attempting this does have the potential to cause confusion, since players might assume that the environment will not allow them to move through a hole that is smaller than they are. To get around this, *What Remains of Edith Finch* presents distinct visual cues to let them know that they can move forward. A common way that the game hints at this is by starting the character's crouching animation slightly before they actually reach the gap. The visual enthymeme concludes that if one keeps moving forward then Edith will likewise continue on the same trajectory because Edith's head slowly moving closer to the ground as the player walks forward creates the impression of continuous movement. Similarly, the case of the Finch family's mailbox supplies two different visual cues to the player while establishing the procedure for interacting with in-game objects; this is the first time when the small hand icon is used and it is also the introduction of what later becomes a common occurrence wherein Edith's hand begins doing something that the player is procedurally expected to carry through. The way that Edith's hand grabs the top of the door and starts to pull on it ever-so-slightly is a second directional hint. Hinting visually at how the player is meant to open the mailbox door is quite helpful and equips them with a basic understanding of how interacting with objects is likely to work moving forward. Still, perhaps the most direct and effective way in which *What Remains of Edith Finch* teaches players to do so is simply by presenting them with a mailbox, something that most people have used before, and expecting them to already know how it works.



## Hypermediacy

When interacting with certain objects in the Finch house, the game's procedure can change to simulate the physical act of controlling that object. Of course, the game cannot physically place a book in front of the player and ask that they open it, but it can show that the player-character is moving their hand to open that book and provide enough visual premises to encourage the desired gesture. In doing so, *What Remains of Edith Finch* has remediated the original technology into a digital space in order to display a subject, most frequently a picture or written text. It does not always remediate objects faithfully, however. Rather, the game takes on the challenge of expanding technologies past their original boundaries, turning a cheap horror-themed comic book into an interactive experience where some panels come to life and give the player a chance to participate in the story. Most notable examples of expanded remediation in *What Remains of Edith Finch* are used as procedural framing devices for characters' vignettes to get across the relative temporality of their tales, and more importantly their deaths. Even the aforementioned comic book – one which details a dramatized version of the events leading to Barbara Finch's death in 1960, having been published in the following year – is heavily inspired by the visual style seen in similar issues that were likewise released in the mid-1900s by popular print-media companies such as the Marvel Comics Group. This book has a dual function as both an extended remediation, delivering Barbara's vignette in an entertaining way, and as a visual indicator of when the events described take place.

When technologies are remediated in video games like this, there are a few approaches that can be taken. Some games, when remediating notebooks that the player is meant to find around the environment, will bring up a separate window that is overlaid on top of the actual gameplay and contains a plain text version of whatever was written on the book. The subject of

the remediation is simply the written content that the object would have been attempting to get across, so the developers do not feel it necessary to preserve the same reading experience that one might get from trying to interpret an old, smudged, and potentially bloodied notebook. An act of hypermediation, the game is making the mediating element into the main focus and, in doing so, reducing the immediacy with which the original subject is being presented. However, it can be important to keep in mind that the relative immediacy and hypermediacy of a text is an inherent quality of that specific remediation in the state it has been presented by its creator. An audience member's reaction to it can be more aptly understood using the terms looking-at and looking-through which describe a person's ability to observe the mediating element and the mediated subject respectively.

Varying degrees of hypermediation can encourage one or the other in a specific instance, but the act of looking-at or looking-through is experienced by the viewer. In other words, the thing that stands between the viewer and the subject can be acknowledged (looking-at) or ignored (looking-through) partially at the discretion of the person interacting with that hypermediation, a decision which is not reliably conscious or unconscious. It can be either or even a combination of both. One might not think much about the blocks of text and visual graphics strewn about the outer edge of a news channel's main coverage, having unintentionally looked-through to the story being presented. Meanwhile, the same viewer can actively decide, at any time, to begin looking-at those things and focusing more on them than on the actual news. Doing so is not always their choice, however, since the news station may also incorporate graphics that are more eye-catching, thus distracting the viewer and forcing them to look-at the framing rather than looking-through it. Meanwhile, that viewer who has been encouraged to look-at those mediating elements can make the conscious decision to actively ignore them and

try to focus on the deemphasized news coverage, often out of frustration with the fact that they are being prevented from taking in a piece of media in a way that feels natural. The experiences of looking-at and looking-through are

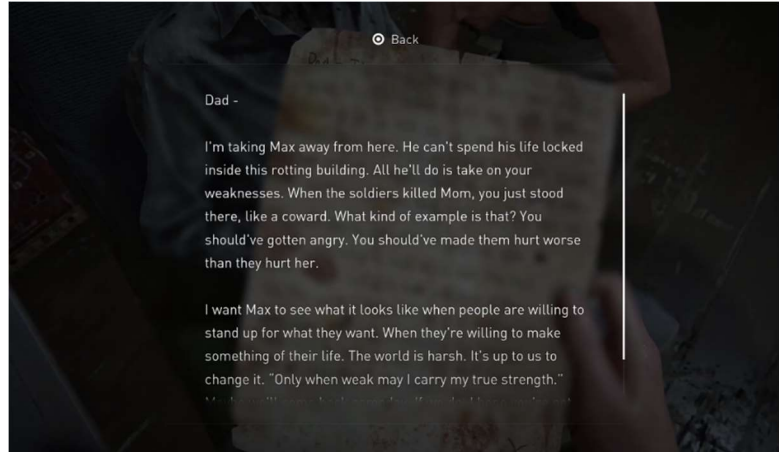


Figure 2.8. *The Last of Us Part II* Note with Plain-Text Overlay

difficult to conceptualize as either intentionally chosen by the viewer or unconsciously forced upon them by the rhetor, naturally swinging between both.

*The Last of Us Part II* is, again, a great example of the relationship between developers' intentional hypermediation of a subject and the audience's willingness to look-at or look-through that mediation. Furthermore, it shows how video games can make the differentiation between looking-at and looking-through into more of a conscious choice on the part of the player. In this game, the object is, as previously discussed, overlaid with a plain text version of its contents that has been simplified for ease of reading (see Figure 2.8). This is a hypermediation of the original subject on the part of the developers. The bringing forth of the mediating element into the foreground of audiences' attention is inherent to the game's design. This does not mean, however, that the player is obligated to merely look-at the text box; to the contrary, most players identify the content as part of the original document while not regarding the hypermediation as anything more than a delivery method. They feel as if they are reading the pure content of the subject despite it being presented in a strongly hypermediated form. This is where it becomes important to recall the idea of immediacy, or the viewer's perception of direct access to the mediated subject, in conjunction with hypermediacy. They do usually operate as opposing

forces, one's increase causing the other's decrease. As discussed in the Literature Review section of Chapter One, however, hypermediation can also sometimes be used to imply immediacy which is precisely what the plain-text overlay is doing in *The Last of Us Part II*.

Another contributor to this feeling may also be that *The Last of Us Part II* permits the player to opt out of the majority of the text's hypermediation. One can input a command that gets rid of the plain text box and opens the door to observing how the original document was written. Doing so can often provide valuable insight based on how hurried the handwriting appears to be, what color of ink was used, whether the text is accompanied by illustrations, which lines of text have been crossed out, and whether bloodstains are present on the paper. The text's level of immediacy has been made into a conscious choice on the part of the individual so that, if a person begins to look-at the mediating element instead of looking-through it as intended, they then can remove it.

A process that is deeply rooted in the logic of hypermediacy, providing a version of the remediated text that is separated into multiple understandings of the same media harkens back to when Bolter and Grusin first set about establishing their framework: "Hypermediacy expresses itself as multiplicity. If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible" (33). If *The Last of Us Part II* had simply provided the original note to the player with no overlaid text box clarifying its contents, then that remediation would have adhered more strictly to the logic of transparent immediacy (Bolter and Grusin 21-31). Opening up one's experience of the text to two interchangeable and coexistent formats, both with their own representative strengths and weaknesses, pulls it sharply in the direction of hypermediacy. Bolter and Grusin do state that transparent immediacy does not instantaneously create a naive

belief that the subject is not being mediated, but it is still partially up to the audience to determine how willing they are to look past its mediation (30). Aligning with the logic of hypermediacy is not shattering the viewer's perception of the subject as immediately available because it never fully existed. The multiplicity of representative forms merely allows them to command more conscious authority over their degree of looking-at and looking-through.

*What Remains of Edith Finch* appears to take a similar, if slightly more avant garde, approach to remediating written media. It intentionally thrusts the player into seeing the remediated object while taking in its contents, but often removes the text from its source and turns it into narrative exposition for the following sequence, disembodied until the end of the vignette. It is still known to be part of a physical piece of media, but the game wants the player to look-through that document so completely that its continuous presence is deemed unnecessary. Because the player has not been given a choice in the matter, though, the game also does not exclude them from any insights that may have been gleaned from reading the original text in its purer form. They are introduced to the mediating object at whatever time they choose to interact with it, they have the opportunity to make note of its physical properties, and then it is partially removed while its contents are presented in other ways. This is usually the case for vignettes where the thing being remediated is a written document such as Molly's diary, Walter's notepad, Gus's poem, etc.

In the poem's case, the text's real-world presentation is brought back into play thematically within the vignette while its physical presence is eliminated entirely. The location of this poem happens to be one of the only cases where more than one inescapable vignette can be triggered from the same room because it was the childhood bedroom of three different children – Gregory, Dawn, and Gus – but only Gregory and Gus still have items left there that can be



Figure 2.9. Visual Transition into Gus's Vignette

interacted with. The poem was written by Edith's mother, Dawn, after Gus's death when they were both still children. It is presented on a long strip of paper that has been wrapped around the wooden spool of an old kite in place of its string. When Edith begins reading the poem aloud, the screen slowly turns black and the text is inverted to white so that it remains on the screen after the rest of the scenery has faded away, a process shown in Figure 2.9. In this way, the text is the transitional element between the real world and the vignette that illustrates what happened in the poem.

Preserving the text's content while transitioning

from a physical container into a visual depiction plays into Bolter and Grusin's theories on the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in ways that may be difficult to fully encapsulate here. Firstly, it shifts focus from the object to the information it is relaying. By placing the viewer in the perspective of Gus, they are given direct access to the events being described in the poem, creating the feeling of immediacy. Conceptualizing the scene in this way might lead some players to view Gus's experiences on the beach as the subject, the thing that is being mediated. The poem, a container which describes what happened in a textual medium, is then the mediating element that stands between the player and the scene. The persistent floating text and narration seems to support this viewpoint, hypermediating Gus's environment and reminding players that they are only reading a testimonial about the events depicted. One can take another angle on this scene, though. If the audience thinks of the poem

itself as the physical artifact being remediated, then the scene with Gus on the beach becomes the hypermediating element separating the player from the written work.

These two interpretations also switch whether a person is looking-at or looking-through, and even how they consciously think they are observing the sequence. When the visual scene is the subject, looking-through means understanding the text as supplemental to what they are focused on; when the text is the subject, looking-through means understanding that the scene is merely a representation of what they are reading. Both are equally correct and one can switch back and forth as they wish, assuming that the viewer is aware of which one they are using. Most often, this will be an unconscious choice made at the moment when the poem transitions into the beach scene and is probably motivated by what the player believes is true. If the vignettes are, for the most part, being seen as unreliable interpretations of past events, then one may be more inclined to choose the poem as the subject because it is a concrete artifact that is merely being interpreted; if the vignettes are regarded as more accurately depicting those events, then one may well choose the beach scene as the subject because the poem is the subjective testimonial of a grieving child and therefore cannot be entirely relied upon.

Recontextualizing a plain-text document through an act of hypermediation is a common occurrence in *What Remains of Edith Finch* – in fact, since the game is revealed to be contained within Edith’s diary after her death, it makes up most of the information one is given – but there are also numerous other, more complex technologies found within the digital environment that are worth investigation. Approaching a remediated object frequently harkens back to the creation of procedural enthymemes using visual ones and, oddly enough, an object of this kind has already been used as an example in a previous section discussing that topic. The mailbox at the beginning of the game is clearly not actually a mailbox that exists in physical space, but it is a

digital remediation of a mailbox's appearance and function. When the game is trying to encourage the player to open its door, one of the premises that helps the process along is the existing knowledge of how a mailbox usually opens downward. The player is expected to visually approximate the physical act of opening the mailbox by holding down the left-mouse-button (gripping the mailbox's door) and moving the mouse back towards their body (pulling down on its handle). It is an interactional requirement wherein one's prior experience with the remediated technology informs their ability to intuit what they need to do. The mailbox is one of the simpler examples of this phenomenon in the game which is also why it is the first object of its kind that the player interacts with. It is usually wise, when designing a video game, to confront players with the easiest, most elementary version of a mechanic before gradually teaching them how to overcome increasing difficulty. Later and more complex technologies necessitate nuanced understandings of how they work, making them harder to intuitively understand. They can, however, be used to great effect once things like the mailbox have already set the stage for them.

Sam's stack of photographs is an excellent example as interacting with them results in a vignette requiring the player to take the same pictures that were originally in his envelope. The fact that one is viewing the world through a camera is made abundantly clear because of both the reticles and the player's ability to adjust the camera's focal length, the former being shown in Figure 2.10. However, this is an older camera, as mentioned earlier in the game when Edith enters the make-



Figure 2.10. Sam Taking Dawn's Picture



shift dark room that Sam's father, Sven, fashioned for developing film. There are a couple of gameplay expectations placed on the player here; they must know that a camera's focus dictates how far away the subject can be for pictures to come out clearly and then they have to be able to take the picture once the focal length is adjusted correctly. The latter is fairly easy to decipher, but the former has the potential to confuse some people.

Most cameras that the average person uses on a daily basis focus automatically, or at least have a button to trigger an automatic focus. From an interactional enthymematic standpoint, if a person has never operated an older camera with a manual focus, then they may not have the information needed to independently complete Sam's vignette. This is not to say that they are unfamiliar with elementary video game controls as in the earlier section on procedural rhetoric and interactional enthymematic theory, but that they lack experience with an older technology that has been remediated within the game. These players, who have never interacted directly with a camera like the one Sam has, may not immediately know what to do. Their advantage in this situation is only found in their ability to recognize that they do not know how to do something and then begin testing different physical command inputs to see what works. Another example of this that seems to catch even more players off-guard is Odin's View-Master. At first, it may seem that a slideshow like this would be controlled by moving left to right, but someone who is familiar with View-Masters will know that there is a lever on the side that must be pulled down to progress the slideshow, a lever that is not visible to the player while using Odin's View-Master. As such, people who have used a physical one before are far more likely to immediately understand that they need to follow the physical movement of the lever that controls the internal mechanism.

Both of these examples are reliant upon hypermediacy to function. They are portraying a subject – Sam is photographing his daughter, Dawn, on a hunting trip in the woods and Odin’s View-Master shows early 20<sup>th</sup> century photos of the Finch family’s arrival in the United States – but that is not all that is being shown. The mediating technology is front and center in these characters’ vignettes with the camera’s reticle and View-Master’s square aspect ratio with curved corners acting as constant frames for what is being depicted. Their ever-presence draws audiences’ attention to the fact that they are viewing the world through an existing technology with a specific function, encouraging them to look-at the mediating party to understand the vignettes’ temporality; Sam’s camera indicates a late-1900s setting and Odin’s black-and-white View-Masters slides alludes to the relative time of his death, almost half a century earlier. These framing devices also serve to instruct the player on what they need to do to progress. Once they have that knowledge and can smoothly interact with the game’s controls, then they are able to look-through to the subject, now aware of the approximate time-periods the stories are set in. Sam’s vignette does slightly diverge from Odin’s in this respect because the player has to use the focus to adjust their view for every new picture they take. While both objects are hypermediated throughout their implementation, Sam’s requires that the audience directly interact with it in an extremely visible way on a quite consistent basis to make sure that the subject is not literally obscured. The logic of immediacy is abandoned in favor of making looking-at a requirement for the procedural fulfillment of the game’s story.

### **Actionable vs. Conceptual Conclusions**

The technical observation of how these theories contribute to *What Remains of Edith Finch*’s functioning can be invaluable, but each method of understanding enthymemes can also generate non-procedural conclusions. Counterintuitively, this includes the procedural

enthymeme, a method of understanding what is expected of the player which can also have alternative implications. As discussed in the literature review section of Chapter One, Bogost agrees that the necessity of aligning one's actions with the ideological beliefs of a political party in *Take Back Illinois* does make a non-procedural statement; it tells the player that the only way to make positive change is to pursue exclusively conservative political actions in accordance with Illinois House Republicans' stances at the time of its commission in 2004 (142). The premises of the game's procedural argument are exactly the same as they always were, but this theory demonstrates how one enthymeme can generate multiple forms of conclusions. As such, I will be differentiating between them based on their own merits, not those of the enthymeme from which they originate: If an enthymematic conclusion, derived from a procedural enthymeme, is purely mechanical and encourages the player to interact with the game's systems in a certain way, then I propose that it be referred to as an actionable conclusion; meanwhile, if an enthymematic conclusion is non-procedural, while still having been derived from a procedural enthymeme, and works to convey an ideological or narrative meaning, then I recommend referring to it as a conceptual conclusion. It must be emphasized here that these terms are not meaningful when applied to other kinds of enthymemes because their conclusions are already non-procedural. Another model's conclusions can be used as premises within a 3.0 procedural enthymeme, but their conclusions do not mechanically inform gameplay in isolation. So, the terms actionable and conceptual do not apply to them.

Actionable conclusions in *What Remains of Edith Finch* consist of much the same things that have been discussed over the duration of this chapter. In order to prompt Edith to give her thoughts on various things, the player must continue moving through the house and interacting with objects or points of interest. The actionable conclusion of those statements, or mechanical

fulfillment of the enthymeme, is to keep maneuvering about the environment and looking for things to interact with. A conceptual conclusion based on the same set of premises might be that exploring her childhood home is the only way for Edith to put her thoughts together at all. While there is no particular action that this conclusion calls for, it does give the player a certain amount of insight into the character that they are inhabiting and her personal motivations; going back to the house was a necessity brought on by the desire to finally construct an internal concept of her familial history. The most pervasive elements of Edith's family situation, having made lasting impressions on her development, are that most of her relatives were dead before she ever knew them, the adults who were around during her childhood became either unreliable sources or unwilling to share information because of their unresolved trauma, and she left the house with her mother when she was 11 years old. She has been unaware of most of the stories presented by the game's narrative up to the age of 17, and her desire to understand the context of her existence has only grown with time. Mechanically demanding that the player seek out parts of their environment that help Edith to put her thoughts together is an incredibly effective way of impressing that desire onto players without having her explicitly state what she hopes to gain from this venture. Furthermore, making the unraveling of the Finch family's story the only way of finishing the game parallels how necessary she feels that it is for her to return to the house.

As I said before, only procedural enthymemes generate procedural, or actionable, conclusions. However, it is important to understand how other forms, like Smith's visual enthymematic theory, can be used in conjunction with procedural rhetoric to produce actionable conclusions while also supplying their own independent probability-based conclusions. Smith's primary motivation in using a 2.0 conceptualization of enthymemes revolves around how images can be used in argumentation, an appropriately classical use for them. Most of the procedural

uses for visual enthymemes involve the cues employed in *What Remains of Edith Finch* to lead players through a physical space according to the developers' intended route. When confronted with text that is far off in the distance from where Edith is standing, it informs the player that there is most likely something further out in the water. This conclusion is then used as a premise in the 3.0 procedural enthymeme that encourages them to look through the telescope on the other side of Odin's monument to get a better view of it. Using this same visual enthymeme, with the text's relative distance and positioning of the telescope as premises (the latter also doubles as a remediated piece of technology that one must grasp the purpose of in order to understand the situation), a probable conclusion can be drawn in regard to Edie's character and lived experiences, a conclusion derived purely from the visual enthymeme at work rather than from the procedural one. Not only is the house itself far away, just barely poking out of the water, but also the thought of it is somewhat distant. Edie's internal concept of her old home has become similar to its physical appearance, hazy and mostly obscured by time and the elements.

Alternatively, one might come away with the impression that the old house is particularly distant in Edith's memory since it has always existed in its current state as long as she has been alive. She never lived there or even set foot inside, so naturally when she thinks of it she is only able to conjure a far-off, vague impression of something that she has little personal connection to. Because this is a conclusion resulting from a 2.0 visual enthymeme, these are not the objectively correct interpretations of the cues given to players, only the most probable assumptions.

Instances where a hypermediated technology is being used to convey part of the story are fascinating when it comes to how they interact with enthymematic forms to generate conclusions; these technologies and their uses can tell the player a lot about a vignette's subject. Sam is once again an apt way to begin looking at this because the film grain, reticle, and focal

controls can all provide insights into Sam's character and his relationship with Dawn. Firstly, the camera gives the impression of a temporal placement, a probable conclusion generated by the visual traits of the camera's point-of-view using 2.0 enthymemes, which is corroborated by Sam's death-date in 1983. From a procedural rhetoric approach, however, the same enthymemes that generate actionable conclusions and guide the player through the vignette can have conceptual conclusions as well. Establishing the premises that indicate how to control the focal length, the game provides the visual cue that the subject is out of focus and expects the player to connect their control inputs to the act of adjusting the focal length. Actionably, one can then deduce that they have to focus the camera on the correct subject in order to take the picture. Conceptually, one might conclude that Sam is himself attempting to focus on what matters to him at this time in his life, his young daughter. This does seem to be supported by yet another conceptual conclusion, derived from the procedural enthymeme that dictates how one moves on to taking the next picture; most of the time, it is Dawn who has to be in frame and in focus before the player can progress. The only times when this is not the case is when Dawn herself is holding the camera. Notably, Sam is not the intended subject of Dawn's photos, indicating that, while he is trying to focus on her, she is not equally interested in spending time with her father.

All of these concepts frequently work together in varying combinations and configurations to sew conceptual conclusions into the mechanical framework of *What Remains of Edith Finch*. Most distinctly, they can be seen cooperating in the construction of nostalgic

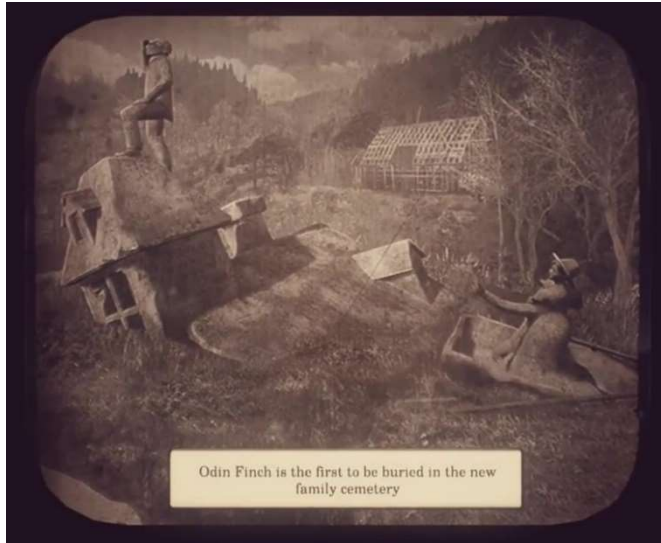


Figure 2.11. Odin's Monument

a View-Master slide that is part of Odin's short vignette. His is a large, stone statue showing him standing atop the old house while it sinks with Edie and Sven reaching out to him from their small rowboat. It is an imposing figure on its own which hides behind it a small ledge overlooking the ocean. There is a stationary viewing telescope there, pointed directly at the top of the old house.

Odin's monument and the top of the old house in the distance is an amalgamation of the theories that have been discussed so far as well as an apt demonstration of how they construct both actionable and conceptual conclusions. A procedure is established using one premise derived from a visual enthymeme and another derived from an interactional 3.0 enthymeme that is based on hypermediated technology. The visual enthymeme presents the distance of the text from the overlook and difficulty with which the player can observe the top of the house; a conclusion drawn from these premises is intended to be that the house is quite far away which is why it is hard to see clearly. As for hypermediation, the telescope itself is a digital recreation of a real stationary tourist telescope that one might see at national parks, the top of the Empire State Building, or in a variety of settings where one is encouraged to look at a subject that is some

imagery which lends a distinct tangibility to the passage of time. The old house sticking out of the water is an impactful piece of world-building and character development on the part of Edie, a person defined by her longevity and defiant nature, particularly because of how she designed Odin's monument, depicted in Figure 2.11 through

distance away. Players are expected to understand that and recognize its most likely purpose as a result, again derived from a probability-based visual enthymeme, concluding that if they use the telescope they will be able to see something that they ordinarily could not, or that they would otherwise have trouble seeing. These two conclusions can then go on to act as premises in a procedural enthymeme, generating an actionable conclusion: the house is quite far away and hard to see, the telescope can help one to more clearly observe distant subjects, and so the player concludes that they should look through the telescope to see the top of the house clearly.

This is far from the only conclusion to draw from the information provided, though, because this small part of the Finch cemetery can also generate narrative-centered conclusions that lend depth to Edie's character. For instance, the player has already been told that Edie is the person who designed the cemetery, including the statue of Odin and surrounding area. She is responsible for installing the telescope where she did, nestled behind her late father's monument. The distance obscuring the top of the old house and the understood function of the telescope, with this context behind it, paint a picture of Edie as someone tied to the past. She erected the telescope because, in dark moments, hiding behind a romanticized image of Odin and peering into the distance at the house she grew up in is one of the only things that allows her to escape her situation. There is a nostalgic feeling elicited from the telescope's visually apparent age, rust on the eyepiece, and small circular reticle. Not only this, but the small path that one takes to reach the telescope goes nowhere. It winds down behind the statue and then ends, not offering anything to visitors except for the opportunity to hide from the rest of the world, and notably from the rest of the cemetery as well, in the arms of comfortably unchanging memories.



## Conclusion

The separate abilities of these theories, from enthymematic theory to hypermediation, to emphasize the expert game-design behind *What Remains of Edith Finch* is far-reaching and can be applied to basically all corners of the digital environment that Giant Sparrow's team created. Procedural rhetoric permits rhetoricians to observe how interactivity changes the way stories like this one are told and the many unique ways that they can affect players. Visual enthymemes function as a way for the game to present information about the game's environment without having to say anything explicitly, relying on predetermined conventions and understood probabilities to communicate concepts. Hypermediacy clears the way for developers to play with how their audience interacts with the story, how separated from or close to the on-screen world they are able to feel. They all have their own unique contributions to make, but the last section on actionable and conceptual conclusions demonstrates that they are perhaps most effective when working together.

Each of these theoretical frameworks can easily act as a contributor to the final point of the others. In particular, both the 3.0 and 2.0 enthymematic forms on which procedural rhetoric and visual enthymematic theory are based can generate fascinating conclusions that feed into one another; a conceptual conclusion from a procedural enthymeme can become a premise in a later visual enthymeme, and the conclusion derived from a 2.0-based visual enthymeme can become a premise in a 3.0-based procedural one. They do not act in isolation, just like most elements of game-design. Indeed, I would argue that they can be far more impactful together than either can be on its own, and Chapter Three is where I hope to make this point with the addition of the third major enthymematic model, 1.0 enthymization. Together, they form an exploratory theory of enthymematic inquiry that incorporates their collective strengths: the nesting-doll model.