

Solving the True, Good, and Beautiful Puzzle

The Video Game as *Objet Ambigu*

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore the opportunities of video games to provide experiential engagement with the true, good, and beautiful ideal. I propose an understanding of the video game as an *objet ambigu* and, thus, as an artefact that thrives in providing potential brought forth by those who engage with it. Video games offer adaptive, virtual spaces based on clearly defined aesthetics, rules, and mechanics but can only set them into meaningful motions through their players. Thus, their overall effect is tightly linked to the subjective approach of its play-

ers, which, as I argue, allows them to engage with their subjective, inner sentiments of abstract idealistic meaning dimensions as they are present in the true, good, and beautiful. This musing is exercised in a playthrough analysis of the walking simulator *Draugen* and critically reflected upon in a concluding discussion.

Keywords: *Draugen*, *Experience*, *Game Studies*, *Objet Ambigu*, *Subjectivity*, *Video Game*, *Walking Simulator*

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This isn't Agatha Christie.
 There won't be a convenient set of clues
 leading to a tidy conclusion.
 Edward Harden, *Draugen* (Red Thread Games 2019)

Introduction. The Unwieldy Artefact

Video games are a medium of potential. Interactive by design, they utilise their innate capability for self-driven and self-guided exploration to provide players with meaningful experiences (cf. Schell 2008; Sylvester 2013). These impactful moments arise from the players' own choice and agency, the "appropriate and understandable impact [of their actions] on the world the computer presents to them" (Murray 2004, 1; addition by F.S.). While it has been popular for video games to show pre-recorded (auto)gameplay material when no mechanic input is provided on the starting screen, these passive spectacles were primarily facilitated to encourage active engagement. They typically portray scenes that take place in later parts of the game, aiming to spark excitement. They invite players to discover these scenes, to engage with them on their own terms and to reimagine gameplay according to their own agency once they are ready to play and live up to this promise. The value of player experiences, if approached from this perspective, then comes not only from how one interacts with the medium but from how one decides to enact agency in favour of other possibilities. This unspoken invitation to purposefully choose one and deny oneself other self-performed modes of engagement is, one may cheekily remark, the virtual joy of playing video games.

Building on this idea of virtual joy as the oscillating *jouissance* between what is, what may be, and what cannot be, video games resemble a mirror cabinet of the *un*-achievable and *un*-unifiable. Every potential action a player does not take is a cenotaph of the wilful exclusion of another option, or options. Likewise, video games are also a mirror of personally motivated inclusion, as players are driven by immediate social and personal considerations embedded in their prior gaming literacy and the composition of the games they currently play (Mäyrä 2007, 813). Players typically play video games in a fashion that closely matches their desired experience and do so within a medium that, while interactive, can only execute one command at a time. Players may choose different options if they reload an earlier game state or if they replay the game, but they may never engage with several options simultaneously during a single playthrough. Such options represent mutually exclusive choices that create a coherent gameplay experience individually but are mutually exclusive otherwise. Video games offer a plethora of exciting choices,

to summon the spirit of game designer Sid Meyer once more, as many did before me (e.g. Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2013 [2008], 43), but equally a plethora of self-inspection, as they inspire us to question why we made certain choices instead of others. In short, the virtual joy that video games, as an artwork, spark is a first step towards fathoming their transcendental quality.

In the following, I argue for video games as a medium of potential and thus, a puzzle that evokes sentiments of the true, good, and beautiful. By potential, I lean into the above illustrated virtual joy of video games, the fact that video games are an interactive medium that, on the one hand, relies directly on player action in an input-output loop but that, on the other hand, also shapes player experiences by being a direct result of their subjective performances in-game. This potential is, in turn, a crucial quality in understanding the philosophical figure of the *objet ambigu* (cf. Blumenberg 2017 [1964]), a fitting juxtaposition for the exploration of human and subjective experiences that may occur when engaging with the medium in all its facets, as I have explored in my prior works (cf. Schniz 2021a; 2021b). I open by outlining what it means to experience the true, good, and beautiful *trias* before attributing these qualities to a superimposition of the timeless concept of the *objet ambigu* to the contemporary video game. Both can be considered complex and, at times, paradox artefacts – convoluted and consisting of inconsistencies unless one takes full advantage of the agency they offer and submits to the fact that they bring out the sentimental inner only in private and singular explorations of their mysteries. I continue with a case study along this train of thought and share my play experiences of *Draugen*. Commonly classified as an adventure/walking simulator, the game immerses players into the peaceful, yet ominous environment of a deserted village huddled into the mountainscape by a Norwegian fjord. In an analytical approach that acknowledges the undeniable subjectivity in the act of playing a video game, I highlight how the game's setting and ambiguous narrative backdrop incite self-directed, and self-driven explorations of the true, good, and beautiful *trias*. I conclude the analysis with final thoughts on the meaning of video games as pillars of the true, good, and beautiful in general.

Theory. The True, Good, and Beautiful, the *Objet Ambigu*, and its Digital Revival

What do we mean when we speak of the so-called true, good, and beautiful? The shared moniker of transcendentals, commonly applied to these terms since the Middle Ages (Martin 2017, 6), initially demarcates their purpose as celestial guiding principles. Identified as the key ingredients to a good life by Plato (cf. Ficino 1975, 78), this *trias* has resem-

bled ideals of humankind ever since. They are strived for, yet never ultimately achieved or realised. As such, the transcendentals have been re-visited on several occasions in history (cf. Kurz 2015, 19–26). In Hegel’s concept of the absolute spirit, for instance, the triad rears its head as a target ambition, a means by which “humanity confronts itself” (Magee 2010, 29) “with essential questions of being and importance that concern us without manifesting in our objective reality” (Schniz 2021b, 26). Harry Lee Poe argues that

[e]xperience tells us that goodness, truth, and beauty are best understood in personal, relational terms rather than in legal or scientific terms. This common experience suggests that the origin of these values, the continuing basis for these values, and the standard that determines these values is personal rather than impersonal. (Poe 2004, 74)

From such a theological-philosophical perspective, Poe’s words both emphasise and resonate thoroughly with two key concepts necessary to decipher the *trias*: subjectivity and experience.

Correlating Poe’s idea to the thoughts of philosopher Walter Hammel allows building a bridge between the transcendental that is longed for and everyday personal experience. They make up what Hammel refers to as non-empirical experiences (Hammel 1997, 38–42), as they typically evade any science-based leading culture. Hammel argues against the dominance of the empirical (Hammel 1997, 41) and demarcates the importance of experiences that are neither empirically measurable, nor fully accessible or communicable based on language and a shared understanding of reason alone. And in fact, I may add, experiences of the *trias* are based on a profound inner, personal sentiment that oneself embraces as true, good, or beautiful as it is felt, well knowing that another human being may not be able to experience it just the same. Each of us possesses this subjective awareness of the true, good, and beautiful as a *trias* of qualities that matter so much but are ultimately unobtainable in their essence. Hammel converts the true, good, and beautiful into the aesthetic experience, the experience of philosophy in general rather than that of logic exclusively (meaning moments of revelation and understanding), and the experience of the spiritual (that acknowledges a transcendental truth beyond objective reality) (cf. Hammel 1997, 43–59). How these individual longings manifest has been theorised in different fashions. Marshall summarises the key areas in which humans engage with the transcendentals in the following categories: he argues that the beautiful is treated in aesthetic practices, the true, in the sense of what we regard as valid, is treated in logic, and the moral good is treated in ethics (Marshall 1922, 451). As such, happenstances under which we encounter them are not only built on personal wonder and interpretation, but indent along thought patterns that persistently inspire human behaviour and demarcate central pillars of our socio-cultural practices.

On the verge of modernity, the *trias* itself may have been frowned upon, explains Kurz, especially in the self-conception of artists but never lost its appeal, especially from a practical angle (Kurz 2017, 31). Gardner argues that “[the] trio of virtues, while unquestionably in flux and under attack, remain essential to the human experience and, indeed, to human survival. They must not and will not be abandoned” (2011, 13). Their relevance, to return to Kurz, is ever present in contemporary literary criticism (Kurz 2015, 107), where the true, good, and beautiful may not be present as outspoken in evaluation criteria but resonate within the appreciation of works that possess a poetic elegance, their approach to authenticity, or their focus on questions of the undeniably humane (Kurz 2015, 107). Even on a seemingly more grounded level, it is clear that the *trias* still is a guiding companion in our daily lives, when a song, an artwork, or a playful act resonates with our sentiments and leaves us unable to elaborate in a more precise or reflected language with nothing left to say but: ‘it’s beautiful.’ In fact, it may be the case that the transcendental *trias* has never truly been abandoned but that the way by which it can be delved in has merely become more obfuscated.

The *objet ambigu* is a kaleidoscopic, playfully inaccessible artefact ripe with true, good, and beautiful experiences. In its origin story, it is the central conundrum of a plot that points the reader towards its curiosity, confusion, and convergence. Valéry’s fable (cf. Valéry 1991 [1923]) sets the scene with a young Socrates strolling along a beach as he, at first lost in conversation, lays eyes upon a unique pebble. The small item enraptures his attention immediately due to its unique composition. Socrates cannot decipher whether the stone was man-made or shaped by nature. Initially angry at his own inability to decipher the item, Socrates throws it away. Only in hindsight, however, does he arrive at a conclusion: He was torn between two professions and due to his engagement with the item, realises that he wants to be a philosopher rather than a shipwright. The fable’s *ultima ratio* is not solving this puzzle, this *objet ambigu* and its non-harmoniseable facets, but the acknowledgement of its potential (Blumenberg 2017, 88). Only by daring to engage with it, exploring its possibilities, and losing himself in it, Socrates can ultimately give up and, once introspection follows, arrive at a revelation central to shaping his identity.

The video game may as well be regarded as the 21st century reincarnation of the *objet ambigu*, as I noted in 2021. In fact, many titles are quite blunt about possibilities: video games are typically advertised as creative media in which individual player choice matters not only in terms of gameplay but, ideally, in the ultimate resolution of a game’s fictional core – a virtue which is perpetuated by video game developers as the hallmark of good design, as well as revered by academic cycles interested in the medium’s unique capabilities. “Realising that the video game is an *objet ambigu*, a digital artefact of non-

definedness and thus, of potential that may be released as we explore its facets, hints at a distinct spatial quality in this relationship” (Schniz 2021b, 55). In the past, the *objet ambigu* has recurringly been used to analyse art (cf. Foos 1999), but not as much in the analysis of video games. Foos summarises the functions of the *objet ambigu* as a diagram and *Transparentmacher*, in which the artefact itself provides a blueprint outline and lucence of what forces have shaped it and what it could be, as its shape is not steady, underlining its ultimate use not as depicting an artistic artefact but opening a discourse on an item’s potential opportunities for arbitrary or human-influenced shape and design (Schniz 2021b, 55). The *objet ambigu* is tool and artwork alike, and when approached as a means to an unachievable end, it is imbued with a new function: that of the recursive puzzle, through which we intend to unriddle ourselves.

Intermezzo. The True, Good, and Beautiful Self

Using I-form in my following train of thought, especially the central video game analysis of this scientific musing, is of central importance. I do this in cherishment of prior game analysts such as Rusch (2009) and Keogh (2014), who also acknowledge the I in the analytical understanding of the medium. It is a fine line between an objective report and a creative-analytical process that one goes when analysing a video game but a passion as method approach by Jennings

that insists upon the experiences of the critic, whether those experiences are bound in appreciation or distaste. It is an appreciation for the diversity of potential experiences and potential players within a medium in which our experiences shape and transform the text we are studying. Without these experiences, the text we are reading simply would not exist. (Jennings 2015, 14)

In game studies, the question of how far the self is supposed to be present in game analysis is still a topic of debate. I-form in narration can be a sign of strong and determined research, as Thomson (2023, 105) notes, but it can also be a sign of subjectivity, opinionatedness, or reveal the author’s blind spots effectively. It has found a refuge in creative analytical practices (cf. Richardson and St. Pierre 2018), however, which emphasises the importance of personal experience in certain situations, such as social contexts, or for the purpose of accessing the inner. As the works of Rusch, Keogh, and Jennings highlight, moreover, the acknowledgment of the self plays an even more important role in game studies research. As video games are an interactive medium, both demanding and offering agency, their contents, mechanically, narratively, or socially speaking (cf. Schniz

2021a), are neither present without player interaction, nor are they ever present in any other configuration, but the one executed by said player agency. In turn, the importance of a video game for the *trias*, especially considering their status as inner, non-empirical, non-reasonable, and non-objective experience, I thus argue, may only ever be truthfully assessed in the presence of the self. Hence, such a subjective writing style fulfils a dual purpose in the context of this paper, allowing readers to trace a personal play experience which seeks to find the true, good, and beautiful in playing.

The good, true, and beautiful are qualities that are difficult to objectively assess and, in turn, oftentimes evoked by subjective sentiments – and thus, I write in I-form. This stresses the duality of the player-avatar complex and allows me to work out moments of bleeding (in Bowman's sense the idea of thoughts and emotions overlapping between character and player (Bowman 2012)) and allow me to nevertheless provide a finetuned analysis of the good, the true, and the beautiful. In this fashion, I intend to navigate the virtual world (of *Draugen*) aware of my phenomenal limits but without neglecting the impact the game has on my sentiments, may they be intellectual or emotional, as this is the necessary means to lay bare the *trias*.

The magical appeal of the *objet ambigu* and its connection to the true, good, and beautiful lies in the arousal of movement. As the individual components of the *objet ambigu* might not fit together, to the point of contradicting each other, it is up to its observer to let perceptions and thoughts wander across it and to rely on an examination of the self. How do we see what is going on here? Video games, as has been noted in the prior section, function on a similar principle of self-experience (Feige 2015, 173). The act of wandering seems to be a fitting metaphor for the exploration of the *objet ambigu*. Instead of focusing on the destination, the arrival at a conclusion or test result, it is about the journey that we take towards it. What video games provide in surplus is the innate arrangement of a *Geworfenheit* (following Moralde 2014, 3). They transport players into a digital virtual reality which may be relatable to our actual reality but must be operated through hardware input and navigated according to its own rules. Players must learn both of these in order to gain preliminary access to that world on an initial level and, on a second, to get hold of the game's flow, i.e. the question: What is the actual purpose of me doing this? Especially in games like *Draugen*, walking plays a central role in exploring the game world. Environmental narration can be considered as one of the main modes of interactive storytelling – or rather, conveying fictional information diegetically. As defined by Jenkins, environmental narration is concerned with every aspect of a virtual geography that conveys fictional meaning to the players (2004, 123–129). It can be as overt as a book lying around that players can read, or as inconspicuous as the graphical assets that have been chosen to represent floorboards or grass but that, nevertheless, enable players

to develop a spatio-temporal sense of the virtual world they inhabit. Consequently, the way of making a fictional world accessible is strongly determined by its interactivity in all its facets: it thrives in elements of the virtual worlds that can be interacted with but also in the most passive that players, nevertheless, will only be able to decipher if they practice an aware mode of traversal and acknowledge them as a part of their experience (Schniz 2021b, 127–131). In video games like *Draugen*, as will be elaborated later, parts of the narration may be conveyed directly to players via narrative instances such as NPCs, other details only emerge if players actively look for them. Moreso, the ability to roam the game space invites players to explore the virtual environment, to take mental notes, and to arrange what they see into a coherent whole of ambience and meaning. An environment operates according to its own rules that we, as human beings, must explore from our individual perspective (cf. de Certeau 2005 [1984], 457). Expressing it can only do so much and there must be a way to express what I personally see and behold. The video game and the *objet ambigu* both are spatial and deserve exploration (Schniz 2021b, 55; cf. Nitsche 2008).

The understanding of exploring the digital puzzle a foot is exercised in the video game *Draugen* (Red Thread Games 2019). True to the nature of video games to function as environmental storytelling playgrounds, the game provides prompts and checks via an NPC character who serves as the players' alter ego but offers no redeeming answer or ultimate unravelling of the game's mysterious story. Understanding what has happened in that village, the game's central location, based on the story snippets found is left to the players who, as I argue, lean into their sentimental drive for the true, good, and beautiful.

Analysis. Lost at the Epistemological Fjord

Draugen showcases what Catherine Cross (2015) referred to as the alchemy of walking simulators: Instead of building its play-experience on a large number of mechanics that grant players direct means to exert interaction, *Draugen* condenses player interactions to walking, viewing, and mild environmental interactions (such as opening a door ...) when a prompt is given. Walking simulators thrive in players finding agency in the leisurely void of environmental immersion rather than a constant need to interact with a rangy, ever-present dynamic of mechanical engagement strategies. The opening scene of the game underlines this premise: The screen fades from black to a lush, sublime Scandinavian environment, immersing me into the video game environment as much as in the body of my avatar Edward, whom I embody in this setting henceforth. The year, I soon learn, is 1923 and I, as Edward, travelled to a remote village called Graavik in Norway in search for Elizabeth, Edward's missing sister. This introductory passage is tightly corseted even for

a walking simulator, allowing me only to look on as Edward rows towards the shore while listening and stoically responding to his NPC companion Alice. This serves as an introduction to the game's overwhelming nature and the importance of the 'non-mechanic' of gazing – Edward is an aged, physically unfit avatar, breathing heavily as I walk around, and the game regularly offers me to rest at vantage points and to take in the environment, not for a ludic but a strictly sentimental surplus value. Moreover, it establishes the dynamic between our avatar and Alice, who is sitting across from me in the rowing boat and immediately engages me in excited banter. Alice, I learn, is Edward's warden and polar opposite: Edward is smart, soft-spoken and old, while Alice is quirky, energetic, and young. In the playthrough of *Draugen*, she provides a remedy to Edward's/my hesitancy and encourages me to lean into my self-fostered ambition to explore Graavik on my own terms.

Sheaved through the genre clues of the walking simulator, *Draugen* focuses on the epistemological in that Edward and I, the player-avatar compound, experience the events of the game from this shared and limited perspective. As Edward rows a boat towards the village's dock, all I am able to do is look around as a chat with Alice takes place. Graavik is in my back, and as I learn about it and the search for Elizabeth, I develop an anticipation for this mysterious place. Once I am able to look around and see it for myself for the first time, I cannot help but delve into the sublime imagery (cf. Burke (2015 [1757]) of the village houses scattered amidst a large mountainside, accompanied by the sound of thunder from a distant storm. Sticking to the motif of introspection, Alice keeps talking to me throughout, asking me questions about our task. The setup is an interesting subversion of the relationship between players and mentor characters in video games. Mentors typically support players with extra- and intra-diegetic advice in video games, familiarising them with gameplay as much as the fictional setting of a video game world (Skolnick 2014, 29–30). In *Draugen*, however, I am involuntarily placed in the position of a mentor for Alice, and expected to provide guidance in a situation that I cannot possibly foresee. Edward cites Nietzsche once he and Alice set foot on the shores of Graavik, and before making their way to a farmhouse where they expect Elizabeth to be: "Also sprach Zarathustra." (1883, in Red Thread Games 2019). There will not be any guiding force taking my hand through the mysteries that will unravel at Graavik, and I must – no, I am only able to – rely on my own wits and values to develop an understanding of Graavik, as there will not be any superior guidance.

To Edward as much as to myself, Graavik poses a riddle without an evident solution. The deserted village looks too beautiful and intact to be abandoned, yet no soul can be found. The farmhouse that I arrive at together with Alice is abandoned as well, albeit I

find a brooch upstairs that Edward identifies as belonging to Elizabeth. He is determined to find her in Graavik, a determination that Edward bequests to me:

Alongside the stunning vistas, the sound design establishes a palpable sense of place; the wind is constantly roaring through the mountain valley and rustling trees, and there are rushing falls and singing birds. Everything is, in fact, so perfect that it feels unreal, and it's no mistake that that is one of the central dualities that underpin the narrative. (McDonnell 2020, n.p.)

Draugen, in fact, builds on player interest rather than game-system guidance: it leaves the players to their understanding and observations rather than guiding their epistemology. Alice fulfils the role of an emotional mirror companion, bantering with Edward about the joys of life, who finds his rational ambitions challenged. Aside from dialogue choices, the minimalist approach to controls is interrupted in moments that are unrelated to what is foregrounded as the main narrative of the game. Cross describes the gameplay of *Draugen* as

meditative and soothing. There are places Edward can sit to draw in his journal. Although you can run, the game encourages an unhurried pace that rewards attention to its beautiful details. There are pianos to play, bells to ring, cave-ins to outrun, arguments to have, and mental states to break-down. (Cross 2019, n.p.)

While Cross (2019) further notes that this depiction is unfit to do justice to the portrayal of actual mental conditions – the more time I spend in Graavik, the more of Edward's repressed traumata and resulting psychological conditions become evident – it is an idleness that inspires me to experience *Draugen* on my terms. As I explore the village during the upcoming days, I delve into the mysteries of Edward's sister as much as the just seemingly unrelated case of the missing inhabitants of Graavik. I learn of the brothers Johan and Fredrick who operated a mine in Graavik, about a dispute that arose between them and drove a wedge between the villagers, and an ancient Viking treasure that is supposedly hidden away in the mineshafts. Along the exploration of the town's dark past, I keep finding clothing items that belong to Elizabeth according to Edward. But Elizabeth is not to be found and the game urges players to keep exploring day after day.

The more time I spend in Graavik, and the more I believe to gain an understanding of the place, the more does this pluralisation of knowledge turn into a non-understanding in which the number of available and potential answers easily outnumbers the questions asked. I experience this in correlation to the deterioration of Edward's sanity. *Draugen*

reaches a climax on day four, when mine and Edward's journey leads us to the local graveyard. Agency is taken away from me and taken over by Edward who believes that digging up an inconspicuous grave will reveal the body of his sister. He winds up in an argument with Alice as he, instead of his expected sister, uncovers the body of a stranger. In a consequence of the heated argument, he banishes away Alice and she vanishes into thin air. Alice, it is revealed, was never real but a visualisation of Edward's mental condition. The cast of imaginary beings soon after is expanded by a talking angel statue, another figment of Edward's imagination. Alice later returns to Edward's side. He learns to handle his grief better and better and, in the end, he goes out looking for that Viking treasure that has been talked about. Before confirming its existence, however, the mine collapses. Another potential truth is locked away behind a wall of stone, leaving its meaning to Graavik, to my skills of deduction, or imagination alone.

Akin to the nature of the *objet ambigu*, *Draugen* dangles supposed revelations and truths in front of the player that contradict one another; that provoke the need to choose. In these cataclysmic events, singular answers are frayed up into an array of potential meanings. Aethereal guiding figures are summoned by Edward's state of mind as swiftly as they are cast away, and the supposed truth about Graavik, or the relevance of mine or Edward's presence there, is unhinged. The only "figure of authority is our own player-character, restricting his own actions due to his inflated superego" (Jones 2019, n.p.). Each chapter is a day. During the following days, I slowly unravel the mystery of the village. A convolute of mysteries is presented. While to Edward, the search for his sister is foregrounded. The backstory of the brothers is exposed as we find story clues and snippets. Throughout these sequences, Alice functions as a reminder of the undetermined, aiming to prevent Edward from losing himself in the epistemological fallacy of the ultimate ratio that is just around the corner. As he draws all the clues together regardless of their nature and intends to link them all back to the disappearance of his sister, Alice encourages him to see the grand picture of the events of the village rather than losing himself in the singular and futile course of personal redemption. In an ultimate act of resistance, Alice disappears as Edward doesn't stop. The game remains ambiguous in such moments, and moments of the *trias* arise where I seek them.

Ultimately, the experience of *Draugen* is a philosophical video game experience, unravelled by spatial exploration in a virtual world (cf. Schniz 2020). "This is not Agatha Christy", my avatar Edward notices in the middle of the game already, again much in alignment with the liminal state of his intra- and my extradiegetic state of mind. There are clues but they are "not conveniently laid out for a conclusion." What Edward/I took away from the village in terms of sights beheld and attempts at understanding the past made, is not the final revelation. Rather, they are a personal development. Still a part of

Edward's consciousness, Alice suggests that he should write a book about the happenings at the village – just as I am now reporting to you what has happened in the game. Just like Edward, I am encouraged to turn from detective to author, manufacturing my own truth, goodness, and beauty out of my journey. All parts of the *trias* are connected.

Conclusions. The Joy of Not Solving Anything

Draugen and Valéry's tale of the *objet ambigu* share their setting: the beach. Beaches are the liminal in-between of the land and sea. They demarcate a clear border on the one hand, and on the other hand, they yet are constantly changed by the ebb and flow of the water. They unite the un-unitable through flux, the constant back and forth. While the surroundings may be beautiful and while I, as Edward, acted with good intentions, the truth component shifted akin to the waters on the shores of Graavik; what was true was only true while I beheld it.

I proposed the entanglement of the true, good, and beautiful within the puzzle that is the *objet ambigu*: the three transcendental ideals have been identified as generally appealing, yet subjectively engaged with in a complex back and forth of experience and individual practice. I suggested that the *objet ambigu*, a multi-layered, multi-dimensional item that is paradox and inconceivable but able to encourage mental exploration due to these irrational compositional elements. It is a bountiful construct for the exploration of the true, good, and beautiful, as it emphasises the inaccessibility of the art in contrast to the importance of introspection. As idealist framings, the true, good, and beautiful provide an aim but not a fixed target, a phenomenon that occurs in flux. I proposed the video game as the digital and spiritual successor of the *objet ambigu*, as it converts the idea of countless individual parts that may even contradict each other into a virtual corset that allows for such contradictions because it is only individually accessible and recallable by its players. Succinctly, I argue that the joy of these recompositions is achieved by the individual and must therefore be accessed via creative analytical practices that intend for scientific objectivity but nevertheless include the passionate self-perspective and its exercise in wandering a virtual space.

Draugen served as the execution of these ideas due to its compositional embeddedness in walking simulator design practices. Its game world is open to explore, and while giving Edward a storyline and the Edward/player compound many environmental clues to decipher, it does not provide answers. In fact, every time we think we achieve something it is taken away from us. Our sole dramaturgic motivation is my longing as player, including the grand-scale secrets unravelled by the excursion to Graavik as much as the focus on the

beauty of the scenery. Unravelling a tale of loss, grief, and trying to find answers become the main point of the game.

In his *Will to Power*, Nietzsche is appalled by the thought to triangulate the good and beautiful, especially in correlation with the true – for “Truth is ugly” (Nietzsche 1968 [1887], 435), and that “[we] possess art lest we perish of the truth” (Nietzsche 1968, 435). The recomposition becomes a decomposition of the self. Understood each as its own *objet ambigu*, they invite us to thrive within their confines to create our own true, good, and beautiful niches. *Draugen* invites us to see the sunrise, without being concerned of the game’s main objectives.

Draugen’s epilogue concludes my play experience with a single message, living up to the evocative, yet ambiguous tone it carried thus far: “Edward and Alice will return” (Red Thread Games 2019). In the context of my play experience, this is more than a run-of-the-mill Hollywood cliffhanger but a genuine statement underlining the search for the true, good, and beautiful. Edward has confronted his grief, achieved distinct experiences along the way, but this does not equal an ultimate conclusion. Ever-evasive, the true, good, and beautiful persist as ideals to be chased in the video game if we want them to. They exist in the inability to unify all of their parts and the joy we see in there. They grant these features to bloom in our subjective exploration of virtuality.

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