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“I Am Trying to Help You. And This ‘Game’ You’re Playing...” An Analysis of the Rhetoric behind *Until Dawn*’s Psychology

“Help Me to Scare You”

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.

H.P. Lovecraft: *Supernatural Horror in Literature*

Fear is a primal instinct. Whenever an individual becomes afraid, this fear can be utilized to ensure their survival, protecting the person in their temporary state of increased vigilance. The senses are sharpened and the respective muscles prepare the individual for an instant response, safeguarding their wellbeing.¹ Fear is therefore an essential component of self-preservation. However, fear is equally known for being able to paralyze the person who is overcome by it. When this happens, the senses of the body become muffled and the muscles are unresponsive. Thus, mastering fear and not being paralyzed by it can ultimately determine one’s survival.

The quote from H.P. Lovecraft at the beginning of this section becomes more meaningful when one is aware of the above. Yet, the definition of the unknown varies from person to person. This article analyzes the depiction of one’s fear of the unknown in the video game *Until Dawn*.

Until Dawn devices the fear of the unknown like few other games. Sony Computer Entertainment released *Until Dawn* in August 2015; a title exclusively for PlayStation 4. Considered a “sleeper hit,” it proved to be highly regarded not only by players, but also by the computer game critics.² From two different reviews of the game, it was referred to as, one, the “love letter to every horror movie,”³ and two, a game that “redefines the importance of player choice in story-driven adventure games.”⁴

1 Phobias - *The Psychology of Irrational Fear*. Eds. I. MILOSEVIC, R.E. McCABE. Santa Barbara 2015, p. 320.

2 S. BARKER: “Sony Admits PS4 Exclusive *Until Dawn* Was a Sleeper Hit.” *Pushsquare.com*, 4.11.2015. http://www.pushsquare.com/news/2015/10/sony-admits_ps4_exclusive_until_dawn_was_a_sleeper_hit [accessed 30.04.2017].

3 L. BLAIN: “*Until Dawn* Review.” *Gamesradar.com* 24.08.2015. <http://www.gamesradar.com/until-dawn-review/> [accessed 30.04.2017].

4 J. MARCHIAFAVA: “*Until Dawn* - A New Dawn For Interactive Storytelling.” *Gameinformer.com*, 24.08.2015. http://www.gameinformer.com/games/until_

Throughout this horror game the player is purposefully kept in a realm of uncertainty. At the beginning of the game, it is unclear who is trying to murder the group of young people isolated in a remote lodge at the mountain top. When they realize that their safety is jeopardized, the group of young protagonists begin to experience a heightened state of shock and intense fear. Meanwhile, the player is confronted with varying fear-inducing aspects incorporated into the gameplay, which depend on decisions made in the course of the game. *Until Dawn* allows for a unique gameplay experience, where players are confronted with their inner fears, while forced to act in order to ensure the survival of the gamer-controlled protagonists.

This article is the first of the two articles elaborating on the **principle of calibration**. The principle of calibration is a relatively new theoretical concept which states that games need to adapt to the individual player in order to be most persuasive. It is best demonstrated by the scenes of individual therapy sessions depicted in *Until Dawn* and *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*.⁵ Despite the superficial similarities, both games utilize the presence of a psychologist in quite different ways. The present article deals with *Until Dawn* as an example of procedurally calibrated fear stimuli, which varies for each individual player of the game. By contrast, the essay on *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* will focus on the implication of choice to personalize its story elements.

Purpose, Structure, and Perspectives

Drawing on the ancient ideal of *aptum*, this article introduces the principle of calibration for video-game rhetoric. Non-digital media suffer from severe limitations in terms of being capable of audience adaptation. Due to their inability to directly adjust to the individual audience, a rhetorician has to create texts for an implied recipient. Distance communication removed the need for the physical presence of the orator. It expands simultaneously the orator's reach at the cost of reduced intervention capabilities. Video games allow for new means of adaption to the audience and require a new **anticipatory audience consideration** for digital rhetoric.⁶

The principle of calibration states: **The better a video game adjusts its persuasive elements, the more powerful its persua-**

dawn/b/playstation4/archive/2015/08/24/until-dawn-review-game-informer-playstation-4.aspx [accessed 30.04.2017].

⁵ The article focusing on *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* will be published shortly after this essay. S. DWULECKI, A. KHALEDI: "I want you to know this will be different". An analysis of the rhetoric behind *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* psychology." In: *Światy grozy*. Ed. K. OLKUSZ. To be published in autumn of 2017.

⁶ See A. ULRICH, J. KNAPE: *Medienrhetorik des Fernsehens*. Bielefeld 2014, p. 18.

sive abilities become. It requires from a rhetorician to design the artificial intelligence (AI) of the game in such a manner that it is capable to adapt to the individual player. By executing a set of pre-determined commands, the AI calibrates the actual response of the game in order to increase its persuasive power.

The present article is divided into four core segments. “Video Games as Persuasive Texts” explains theoretical foundations of rhetoric such as: *aptum* (aptness), *homunculus digitalis* (AI as proxy for physically absent orators), and the new principle of calibration. The subsequent “Synopsis of *Until Dawn*” introduces the narrative in broad strokes and paves the way for “Framing the Unknown.” The latter section deconstructs the rhetorical effort within the game to create uncertainty. “Calibrated Fear Stimuli Mechanics” capitalizes on this groundwork and shows how the principle of calibration finds its expression within this new type of procedural rhetoric.

It should be stated that this article deliberately pursues an approach that combines rhetoric with psychology. Whilst many authors keep researching on the meaningfulness of procedural rhetoric⁷ or argue against it,⁸ the neo-Aristotelian approach to rhetoric is still under-researched in game studies. Meanwhile, the academic field of psychology has studied video games for many years, and to varying degrees. Notably, this includes the psychology of violence in video games that can lead to aggressive real-life behaviors.⁹ However, the reverse perspective of game studies on psychology as a subject of representation in video games has not been examined. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, there has not been joint efforts between this school of rhetoric and psychology to examine video games so far. Therefore, this intersection can be understood as an academic *terra incognita* that is worth exploring. This article constitutes an attempt to contribute in the said field, as it distinguishes between the game’s mechanical system and the game’s narrative frameworks in order to fully depict how the element of therapy is utilized and implemented to serve the creators’ rhetorical goals. In the meantime, the extent to which the representation of psychologists adequately portrays real-life therapy sessions and their methodology will be examined in what follows. By virtue of being entertainment, video games need to be accurate only within the scope of their individual rhetorical goal.

7 See I. BOGOST: *Procedural Rhetoric*. Cambridge, MA 2007.

8 See M. SICART: “Against Procedurality.” *Game Studies* 2011, vol. 11, no. 3.

9 See R. MCGLOIN, K. FARRAR, M. KRUMHOLTZ, S.J. PARK, J. FISHLOCK: “Modeling outcomes of violent video game play: Applying mental models and model matching to explain the relationship between user differences, game characteristics, enjoyment, and aggressive intentions.” *Computers In Human Behavior* 2016, vol. 62.

Video Games as Persuasive Texts

Theoretical Introduction. Understanding the rhetoric of video games requires a theoretical groundwork. The rhetorician is defined here as a “text-constructing entity” (*textkonstruierende Instanz* in Joachim Knapé’s words¹⁰) that is determined to obtain social validity for his cause.¹¹ For the following argument it is not relevant if the orator is an individual, a group, or social construct. The only relevant aspect is the text-producing ability. Text means in this context “a finite and organized complex of symbols with communicative purpose.”¹² The distinguishing quality of digital texts – and especially video games as a text genre in the rhetorical sense – is its procedural nature. The term procedurality

describes an object whose actual manifestation results from the strict application of a specific set of rules (or procedures) to a particular context. Procedurality allows for the delivery of responses to changes in input and setting. [...] Being particularly suited to the rapid carrying out of large sets of instructions, computers have become a natural medium for procedural objects.¹³

This attribute predestines the computer as a medium for Plato’s philosophical approach to rhetoric. Plato delivered one of the earliest brief definitions of rhetoric as *psychagogia*.¹⁴ It means the leading of the human soul by another human being.

Plato emphasized [in *Phaedrus*] that the dialectic art of persuasion does not mean random or coincidental addressing of things. It rather consists out of a methodically ordered discussion of the disputed subject. The initially overwhelming plurality of natural phenomena is traced back through dialectic speech to its essential unity of form and virtue, and thus made transparent.¹⁵

10 See J. KNAPE: *Was ist Rhetorik?* Stuttgart 2000, p. 33.

11 Ibidem.

12 *Medienrhetorik*. Eds. J. KNAPE. Tübingen 2005, p. 22: “[...] ein begrenzter und geordneter Zeichenkomplex in kommunikativer Absicht.”

13 J. LESSARD: “Procedural.” In: *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*. Eds. M.-L. RYAN, L. EMERSON, B.J. ROBERTSON. Baltimore 2014, p. 407.

14 PLATO: *Phaedrus*, 261a. This definition also illustrated the close connection between rhetoric and psychology. Psychology as the study of the soul is complemented by the practical counterpart of *psychagogia*.

15 P.L. OESTERREICH: “Seelenführung durch Rede.” *Psychologie und Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 215: “Platon macht [im *Phaedrus*] deutlich, dass die dialektische Unterredungskunst kein willkürliches oder zufälliges Ansprechen der Dinge meint. Sie

Plato saw rhetoric as a tool to guide the student from sophistic *phantasma* and towards philosophical insight.¹⁶ However, as an outspoken critic of the written word, he deemed all extra-corporeal media as a mere shadow of true philosophical discourse.¹⁷ A major reason for this assessment is the rigid nature of non-electronic media. While the material of a medium – such as pages or canvas – may decay, its content remains static. A book cannot reply to its readers' questions. In order to receive answers, the (direct) interaction with the author is still required. Computers have revolutionized this process and partially solved this predicament with *procedural rhetoric*. Computers can be regarded as machines that generate rule-based replies with persuasive quality. Yet, these replies require at their inner core a structuring mind and – in terms of intentionality – a strategic communicator.¹⁸ Ian Bogost utilizes this leverage point and formulates the following short definition: "Procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created."¹⁹ Consequently, the structural determinants limiting classic media do not apply to computers and hence video games. Any possible response by the recipient can be addressed through the creation of rule-based procedures. Beyond the narrow scope of Plato's rhetoric terms, it enables a rhetorician to solve an even more important issue.

An Ancient Ideal and Its Digital Realization. The ideal of *aptum* is hard to uphold within the parameters of distance communication. In order to produce persuasive texts one has to abide by an inventory of norms, called *virtutes elocutionis*. They consist of *aptum* (aptness), *latinitas* (grammatical correctness), *perceptitas* (clarity) and *ornatus* (adornment).²⁰ While the last three are independent from the addressee, the first ideal is a problematic goal for strategic communicators. *Aptum* splits up into two different sets of requirements: the **inner** and **outer aptum**.²¹ The former refers to the appropriate structure of a text. In the case of a video game, a rhetorician would have to ask himself if the game structure is fitting for its intended goal. However, the outer *aptum* addresses the needs of the audience. Any orator has to ques-

besteht vielmehr in einem methodisch geordneten Durch-Sprechen des zur Rede Stehenden. Die anfangs verwirrende Vielfalt der Naturphänomene wird durch die dialektische Rede auf ihre wesentlichen Gestalt- und Wirkeinheiten zurückgeführt und somit durchschaubar gemacht" (translation by the authors).

¹⁶ See *ibidem*.

¹⁷ See *ibidem*, pp. 216 f.

¹⁸ See J. KNAPE: *Was ist Rhetorik?...*, p. 33.

¹⁹ I. BOGOST: *Procedural Rhetoric...*, p. 3.

²⁰ See T. SCHIRREN: "Kritieren der Textgestaltung." In: *Rhetoric and Stylistics*. Vol. 2. Eds. U. FIX, A. GARDT, J. KNAPE. Berlin 2009, pp. 1417 ff.

²¹ See G. UEDING, B. STEINBRINK: *Grundriß der Rhetrik*. Stuttgart 2011.

tion whether the argumentation is fitting its audience and the circumstances of the communication act. In face-to-face situations, this issue remains controllable, because it allows for a communicative **tuning-in**.²² By contrast, distance communication basically forces the orator to make educated guesses. The actual recipient remains unknown to the orator. Potential recipients can only be determined through approximate assertions based on external factors, such as the availability of the text and the target group of publication channels. The rhetorician is caught in a difficult position. They either reduce their audience in size and address specifically a small, known group or broaden the audience by allowing more general lines of argumentation, at the cost of a less effective text. Procedurality is an option of bypassing this conundrum, which will only become available in the future.

Appeal to the Individual: The Principle of Calibration. The principle of calibration is the causal result of the outer *aptum*. The rhetorical success for any action is determined by the rhetorician's ability to adjust to the individual outer *aptum*. It can be further deduced that if any kind of text has to be suitable to its circumstances, and video games can be considered texts, it means that video games also have to obey to the ideal of *aptum*. As a result, any video game can be examined in regard to the underlying principle of calibration that states: The better a video game adjusts its persuasive elements, the more powerful its persuasive abilities become.

Calibration means thereby the specific adjustment of elements in order to achieve the highest possible efficiency for each recipient. The term principle is used to express the necessity that derives from *aptum*. If a game developer only seeks to obey to the inner *aptum*, by for instance upholding genre-specific conventions, it might ignore the wide scope of gaming as a social activity.²³ It is required from any kind of rhetorician to anticipate circumstances and minimize their impact.²⁴ The elements that determine the persuasive success vary depending on the game's structure, genre, and rhetorical goal (*telos*). Generally, the better these persuasive elements can be adjusted, the more likely they are to persuade its consumer. This requires systems and mechanics that probe the individual user for preferences. To avoid the impression of intrusion, the orator has to find subtle ways to elicit the necessary information.

22 See J. KNAPE: "Persuasion." In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*. Vol. 6. Ed. G. UEDING. Tübingen 2003, p. 887.

23 Nonetheless, the orator has always the choice to consciously disregard required measure and instead create imaginative or surprising elements. In the end, effectiveness is the defining factor.

24 See T. SCHMOHL: *Persuasion unter Komplexitätsbedingungen*. Wiesbaden 2016, p. 415.

Theoretically, it can already be envisioned that the meta-systems will emerge that collect player-specific data just like achievement systems do regarding in-game progress. By creating individual data reservoirs that would allow to differentiate individual markers based on one's political beliefs, cultural preferences etc., games might be able to become even more powerful as far as their rhetorical adaptability is concerned. In contrast to such concepts as Big Data, this hypothetical decentralized meta-system would not communicate data to the outer world. Instead, the individual game would "internally" – meaning only within the given computer without a connection to external sources – request user data for specific rhetorical elements (like preferred difficulty or known fear stimuli) and adjust its text to the needs of a given individual player. As a result, the gameplay flow could be stabilized, then, since the system would neither overstrain nor underestimate the gamer. Horror games would therefore increase their chances to cause fear correspondingly.

Procedural calibration mechanics will allow future games to address increasingly large audience with precisely targeted messages. The central idea is that the artificial intelligence (AI) of the game would allow to replace the presence of the creator, and therefore, it would operate as an independent *homunculus digitalis* that executes the orders of the orator.²⁵ By analyzing its user, such an AI should be able to adjust and facilitate the persuasive messages according to its prescribed goals. This article argues that horror games like *Until Dawn* have already developed this kind of tool. This genre of games serves as reliable testing devices to examine the principle of calibration. Considering that individuals experience fear due to specific stimuli, the development of mechanics that address the principle of calibration was a predictable outcome that finds its expression in *Until Dawn*.

Synopsis of *Until Dawn*

Until Dawn is a multi-thread horror game. The story begins with a prologue set in 2014: A group of ten friends come together for an annual winter getaway at a remote lodge located on fictional Blackwood Mountain. In the midst of a long celebration, a small group starts to execute a cruel prank on one of their members, Han-

²⁵ The *homunculus digitalis* is a theoretical framework that allows to transfer classical rhetoric theory onto video-game analysis and design. Assuming that the AI can be understood as an artificial ersatz orator, the same affordances apply to the *homunculus digitalis* as well as to its creator. See S. DWULECKI: "Building the Future and Keeping the Past Alive Are One and the Same Thing" – A Rhetorical Analysis of the *Metal Gear Solid* Saga." In: *More After More. Essays Commemorating the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia*. Eds. K. OLKUSZ, M. KŁOSIŃSKI, K.M. MAJ. Kraków 2016.

nah. Well knowing that Hannah has a romantic interest in Mike, the group sets up a prank in Mike's room. After being lured in by Mike himself, Hannah starts undressing, when the members of the group of voyeurs reveal themselves unwillingly. Ashamed and embarrassed, Hannah rushes out of the lodge and into the woods. Her sister Beth – so far oblivious to the machinations taking place upstairs – decides to chase after Hannah. The resulting search ends tragically. The moment Beth is finally able to reach Hannah, the sisters realize that they are being targeted by an unidentified entity. An attempt to escape ends when Hannah slips over the edge of a cliff and drags her sister down with her. The player of the game witnesses both young women dying as a result of the fall.

One year passes. As it turns out, the corpses of the tragically demised girls were never found, and consequently, the two girls were declared missing. However, it becomes quickly apparent that their friends consider them to be dead. The group is about to meet again to commemorate the dead and carry on with the tradition of the winter getaways. However, the very event appears to be a trap. The host, Josh, who is the brother of the deceased, was passed out when the drama unfolded a year ago, which made him unable to prevent the events. Therefore, he plans to unleash the same terrors that were inflicted upon his sisters only one year ago, on the group of his friends. To this end, he designs an alter ego that is referred to in the game narrative as Psycho. In a series of "trials," he pressures his friends to reveal their true feelings. The game purposefully conceals the Josh's involvement in several instances. In order to hide his identity, he wears a fat suit and a menacing clown mask while executing his pranks. His staged death ostensibly retracts him from the active cast. Yet for the purpose of fear calibration, the anonymous therapy sessions are more interesting to analyze. The following description results from an intensive black box analysis of *Until Dawn* and cross-referencing it with play-through recordings. The combined data sets confirm a simple yet effective mechanics that elicits fear stimuli and incorporates them into the gameplay.

Framing the Unknown: The Psychological Setup

Until Dawn introduces the recurrent element of therapy sessions to blur the boundaries of the reality perceived by the player and evoke a feeling of uncertainty. The following section will analyze how the game frames the player's perceptions. The events of *Until Dawn* reveal that all therapy sessions actually took place exclusively in Josh's imagination. At this point, the article will examine how the unknown factors of the patient's identity, as well as the time and place of the meetings, constitute a rhetorical strategy.

“Let’s Talk about...” Whom Exactly? Creating Moments of Uncertainty. For a majority of the game, *Until Dawn* artfully plays with the uncertainty about time, location, and participants of the therapeutic sessions. The player can only construct his or her own interpretations of information delivered to them. Each therapy session is conducted by Dr. Alan J. Hill, as the introduced by a nameplate on his desk.²⁶ The sole personal information about him that is revealed depends on the specific answers of the player of the game. If the player chooses a certain combination of replies, Hill reveals that he originates from Sweden. However, there are no other facts about Dr. Hill which corroborate that he is who he claims to be. At this point in the game, the scarcity of information prevents a definite clarification whether Dr. Hill talks with the gamer or her in-game character.

As a consequence, the player will be confronted with recurrent double addressing.²⁷ The scene is usually presented as an alternation between a first-person perspective and a close-up from behind an anonymous figure. A baseball cap and leather gloves conceal the identity of the patient until Chapter 6, and therefore, it remains uncertain who the patient might be. Dr. Hill might as well address the unknown patient or the gamer. This uncertainty allows for a skillful play with ambiguity. A genuine example of this ambiguity are the introductory words by Dr. Hill:

Before we begin, there are a few things I need to make sure you understand. You see, no one can change what happened last year. The past is beyond our control. You have to accept this in order to move forward. But there is freedom in this revelation. Everything you do, every decision you make from now on, will open doors to the future. I want you to remember this. I want you to remember this as you play your game.²⁸

The opening remark “before we begin” creates a field of ambiguity with a rhetorical purpose. The player has no indication to whom precisely this message is addressed. Dr. Hill might be referring to the onset of therapeutic process or the beginning of the game session. His words are suitable as a framing for a real patient. By stat-

²⁶ RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: “*Until Dawn* All Interviews With Dr. Hill.” Web. Youtube.com. Retrieved 25.08.2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw-muzU4UQPw> - 00:00:15.

²⁷ Double addressing (original *Doppeladressierung*) is a rhetorical term coined by Joachim Knape. It refers to the practice of communicating not to a single distinct group, but two clearly differentiated ones. See J. KNAPE: “Adressatensplitting und Doppeladressierung.” *Familie Partnerschaft Recht* 2013, vol. 11, p. 485.

²⁸ RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: “*Until Dawn* All Interviews With Dr. Hill” - 00:00:21 - 00:00:54.

ing that the events of the past remain unchangeable, he allows his patient to overcome feelings of guilt. Dr. Hill sets a goal for the conversation to focus on the realm of possibility that lies ahead. As is a common approach to therapy, primarily utilized by the representatives of the solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), Dr. Hill focuses on problem-solving for the future rather than dwelling on the negative events that occurred in the past.²⁹ While part of therapy is reserved for clients to talk about the stress they are experiencing in relation to past events, one strong point of therapy is that it seeks to help the person to cope with such a difficulty and adapt and adjust, rather than continue to live in the past and suffer.

“Every Single Choice Will Affect Your Fate” – Establishing the Butterfly Effect. The butterfly effect frames the importance of in-game decisions. In *Until Dawn*, every character can potentially die. Unlike other horror games, for instance *Silent Hill* or *Outlast*, which respond to a failed task with a Game Over screen and require replaying a certain section, *Until Dawn* has a mechanics at its core that is called the butterfly effect. A series of decisions determine the fate of each of the eight protagonists. Consequently, Dr. Hill’s opening words (“Everything you do, every decision you make from now on, will open doors to the future”) can be equally understood as a reference to the freedom of choice within *Until Dawn*. This perspective holds an even higher density of information. By stating “no one can change what happened last year,” the therapist establishes an important premise for the game.

If the player is dedicated to save all of the protagonists, it is mandatory to know whether or not the deaths of Hannah and Beth were inevitable. The motivation behind such a goal can be equally attributed to intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Paul Tassi describes the appeal of the game in the following manner: “It’s a horror game that lets you do battle against the famed ‘idiot teenager’ stereotype by gathering clues and making the proper decisions, both emotional and logical.”³⁰ The player might strive for the satisfaction to fulfill such a task in order to contradict stereotypical notions of the horror genre (intrinsic factor). Alternatively, a player might want to attain certain **in-game achievements** or **trophies** and is motivated by the set rules to acquire such a certificate of accomplishment (extrin-

29 A. FROERER, E. CONNIE: “Solution-Building, the Foundation of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: A Qualitative Delphi Study.” *Journal Of Family Psychotherapy* 2016, no. 1 (27) – doi: 10.1080/08975353.2016.1136545.

30 P. TASSI: “The *Until Dawn* Ending That Fixes The Problem With Every Horror Movie.” *Forbes.com*, 4.09.2015 – <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/09/04/the-until-dawn-ending-that-fixes-the-problem-with-every-horror-movie/#210d216959c3> [accessed 30.04.2017].

sic factor).³¹ The trophies *Four Daughters of Darkness*, *The Quicker Man*, and *They All Live* reward the player for ensuring the survival of all girls, boys, or the entire group, respectively.³² Dr. Hill's statement emphasizes that decisions start to create an impact from this moment on. Therefore, any ambition to attain the aforementioned trophies is not hindered by the sisters' death. "No one can change what happened" might in fact be understood as an instructive explanation which declares all actions meaningful from this point on, and deems a retry of the prologue unnecessary. Dr. Hill emphasizes the player's choice, and yet, the subsequent clarification further perpetuates the perceived uncertainty:

Every single choice will affect your fate, and the fate of those around you. [A pause] So, you have committed to commence with this 'game'.³³

Dr. Hill's statement again remains ambiguous. It is unclear whether the patient is addressed in regard to his or her ability to form life choices or is it communicating the importance of the butterfly effect mechanics to the player. The creators of *Until Dawn* tied their decision-making mechanics with the theory of the butterfly effect.³⁴ Despite not referring to this theory explicitly, the eponymous mechanics creates independent rhetorical arguments. From a psychological perspective, Dr. Hill reframes the events as individual elements of a hyper-complex system. He offers a perspective that allows Josh to reduce feelings of fear by removing a perspective of determinism and accentuates the patient's power of choice. Simultaneously, Dr. Hill's utterances emphasize to the player that this game heavily responds to her in-game decisions. As already mentioned, the game allows the player to determine "the fate of those around" her. The psychologist's statement is worded in such

31 See C. CRUZ, M. HANUS, J. FOX: "The need to achieve: Player's perceptions and uses of extrinsic meta-game reward systems for video game consoles." *Researchgate.net*, 19.08.2015 - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283901339_The_need_to_achieve_Players'_perceptions_and_uses_of_extrinsic_meta-game_reward_systems_for_video_game_consoles [accessed 30.04.2017].

32 See "Until Dawn Trophies." *PSN.profiles.com*, 30.07.2016 - <http://psnprofiles.com/trophies/3804-Until-Dawn> [accessed 30.04.2017].

33 RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: "Until Dawn All Interviews With Dr. Hill" - 00:00:54-00:01:07.

34 The game starts with a short information clip stating "Butterfly Effect: A tiny butterfly flapping its wings today may lead to a devastating hurricane weeks from now." The doctor's explanation is the only other part in the game, where the theorem is explained without instantly referencing a specific occurrence. See "Gamer's Little Playground: *Until Dawn* All Cutscenes (Games Movie) Full Story 1080p HD." Youtube.com. Retrieved 25.08.2015 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXX30aItPO0> - 00:00:13-00:00:18.

a manner that it is not clear how the words “those around you” are meant to be interpreted, and is further ambiguated by the sentence.

More Than Just a Game. Double addressing is emphasized through ambiguous self-referentiality. In both mentioned sections of the introductory scene, Dr. Hill refers to a “game.” The player might assume that the psychologist is actually communicating with her. Such **immersion fractures** are defined as “all phenomena that deliberately deconstruct the immersive effects.”³⁵ As a theoretical advancement of Roland Barthes’ concepts on modes of art perception,³⁶ immersion fractures discontinue the usual gameplay (in Barthes’ terminology *study*) through a significant occurrence (*punctum*), such as the direct addressing of the gamer.³⁷ The self-reference of the game is more elaborate than the audience might think upon first glance. Next to the obvious possibility of addressing the player, Dr. Hill’s statement could be directed at a survivor or at the culprit of the events that are about to take place in *Until Dawn*. The patient could be a survivor who is considered dishonest, and therefore would play a “game” of deceit with Dr. Hill. Or it could be as well that the perpetrator is confronted with a direct judgment of his actions. As long as the audience remains uncertain about the specific timing of the sessions (being conducted before, concurrently with, or after the fatal night), any attempt to narrow down the subject’s identity is in vain. *Ergo*, by employing immersion fractures, the recurrent sessions can be understood as an *aporia* strategy. The player remains in a state of confusion or uncertainty (*aporia*) that is only reversed by the rhetorician.

Creating a (False) Sense of Security. Dr. Hill’s credibility as well as his ability to win the patient’s trust, are established through creating a sense of security. His reassurance is a statement crafted to calm the patient and gamer alike:

This is significant. And I want to help you see it through.
Sometimes... Sometimes these things can be a little scary...
even terrifying... but I am here to make sure that no matter

³⁵ See S. DWULECKI: “Building the Future and Keeping the Past Alive Are One and the Same Thing’...,” p. 162.

³⁶ See R. BARTHES: *Camera Lucida*. New York 1981.

³⁷ Immersion fractures are significantly different from *breaking the fourth wall*, which aims at ripping the audience out of illusion. The immersion is not meant to be broken. Instead, it is reduced to a minimum and thereby allows for rhetorical intervention. After a brief transmission of the persuasive messages, the immersion fully reestablishes and even intensifies for a limited time after its occurrence. See *ibidem*.

how upsetting things may get, you will always find a way to work through it.³⁸

Fear is a pivotal experience of the game. The game has no intention to be too soft on the gamer and risk boredom. As the following section shows, the adherence to the principle of calibration prevents this from happening. Therefore, the above statement by Dr. Hill is a disclaimer and reveals the recurrent nature of the sessions. Its function is to make it clear that after each episode, there will be an emotional safe haven that will (help to) decelerate the intensity and pace of events. Therefore, players have the cognitive reassurance that tension and shock will always be countered at some point by moments of relaxation and refocusing.³⁹

The sessions are strategically positioned after the recapitulation of the chapter that precedes it. These series-like narrative elements begin with a “Previously on *Until Dawn*” sign, followed by a montage of relevant story plots and decisions the gamer has made up to the point.⁴⁰ This semantic reference to modern television series is a clear indication for the narrative as well as rhetorical intention of the designers. *Until Dawn* consists of 45–60 minutes long episodes edited this way for the ease of their consumption. A player could simulate the daily or even weekly broadcast structure of many television series. Therefore, familiar organizing principles as well as the promise of the returning safe haven of the session provide the impression that the player will be given a chance to exhale. This assumption will be revised by the player over the course of the unfolding events and ensure a highly-calibrated experience for the player.

“You Can Trust Me” – Calibrated Fear Stimuli Mechanics

Until Dawn disguises its calibration mechanics with the narrative frame of therapy sessions. This section illustrates how the principle of calibration finds its expression in a purposeful arrangement of individual elements around Josh’s encounters with Dr. Hill. By refraining from overused stereotypes, and instead presenting impressions of real therapeutic methodology, the game persuades the player to believe that the sessions presented within the game’s

38 RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: “*Until Dawn* All Interviews With Dr. Hill” – 00:01:08–00:01:29.

39 The player does not know that the alleviating nature of those sessions will also serve to disintegrate her sense of time as a direct causal result of the game’s narrative.

40 See VAPOR GAMERS OFFICIAL: “Previously On *Until Dawn*.” Youtube.com. Retrieved 9.09.2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbN_L3OmMJA – 00:00:00–00:00:55.

narrative might be real. Meanwhile, the employed tests serve as calibration tools to adjust fear stimuli in order to ensure that the evoked fear is sufficient.

The following paragraphs include an analysis of the therapy sessions in the game from two different angles. First, they analyze the figure of Dr. Hill before and after it is revealed that he is only a hallucination produced by Josh's subconscious. Narrative fragments embedded within the game reveal that Dr. Hill was in fact Josh's former psychologist. Additionally, an alternative perspective includes a psychological report on and treatment plan for Josh, which render him as a real-life client who is seeking actual therapy. Thus, a short report about Josh is provided in order to give the reader an up-to-date understanding of how a psychologist would conceptualize Josh's current need for treatment.

Brief Psychological Report on Josh Washington. Even though one does not see the face of the client until the middle stage of the game, once it becomes clear that the client is Josh, several realizations (may) occur. Immediately, one falls under the impression that Josh is going into therapy in an attempt to cope with the tragic event that occurred approximately one year before and which involved his two sisters dying at their parents' vacation lodge. At the beginning of the therapy, the series of tests that are administered to Josh are done so that the psychologist can determine the accurate diagnosis, in order to structure and administer the treatment in the most suitable way. Importantly, the assessments demonstrated within the game are not actual clinical ones, but they rather represent the type of assessments that are used for the purposes of diagnosing. As the therapy progresses, one may notice a minor twist in that the therapist, for the most part, ignores Josh's feelings about the tragic event that occurred a year before, and instead, spends the majority of the time discussing Josh's fears and anxieties. It is also worth noting that Josh has been struggling with mental illnesses, specifically depression and psychosis, ever since he was a child; therefore, attending therapy is not something that is new or unfamiliar to him.

A psychological report is a piece of necessary documentation about a patient which is written whenever they are admitted for mental health treatment. It is typically completed during the in-take therapy session, where the therapist gathers baseline knowledge about the client such as who they are, why they are seeking psychological treatment, and other relevant information that could assist the clinician's efforts. Overall, patient documentation allows clinicians to track the progress of patients over time. Patient documentation holistically includes psychological reports, and results from psychological tests and assessments, background information about

the individual, treatment goals, in addition to therapy notes about how the sessions are progressing. The following brief psychological report about Josh is written with the assumption in mind that he has sought psychological assistance after the night when he played a prank on his friends at the vacation lodge.

Report: The patient, Josh, a white Caucasian male, has a comorbid diagnosis of psychosis and depression. He is an outgoing individual who maintains a positive relationship with his parents and friends. The patient presents to therapy well-groomed and mild-mannered. His affect is generally cheerful. The patient reports experiencing intense fear and phobias in regard to various aspects in the environment.⁴¹ The patient is seeking treatment because he is currently experiencing a high state of distress after playing a prank on his friends. His friends recently visited him for the one-year anniversary of the death of his sisters at his parents' lodge. Therefore, the patient organized a game to make his friends experience a sample of the horror that his sisters felt only a year earlier, after having been humiliated and terrorized, as he states in his own words. He states that this game was his way of taking vengeance for his sisters, and that the punishment was not even proportional, since his sisters, in turn, will never get their chance to recover from the prank that cost them their lives. Josh is aware that his plan to inflict horror on his friends resulted in them experiencing intense stress and humiliation throughout the weekend in question, and his attendance at therapy sessions seems to be a sign of this. The recommended actions for the client at this stage include introducing the client to about six sessions of exposure therapy to decrease his physiological arousal pertaining to certain environmental fears and phobias, in addition to attending about twelve sessions of psychological therapy to aid his mental health symptoms.

The Doc's Methods. Upon first observing the therapy sessions between Josh and Dr. Hill, the flaws that prevail in Josh's "treatment" become apparent; they are prevalent in the therapist's overly directive style, his unwelcoming tone of voice, the slanderous comments continuously made towards the client, and the inappropriate setting for where the therapy is conducted. Importantly, for a therapist, while working with a client such as Josh, who already suffers from psychosis and depression, showing empathy and understanding for what the client is going through is necessary, and a basic component of every effective therapist-client relationship.⁴² Without this

⁴¹ The specific fears depend on the player's in-game performance. The underlying rhetoric is illustrated in section entitled "Dr. Hill's Methods from a Viewpoint of Rhetoric."

⁴² A. CLARK, T. SIMPSON: "Imagination: An Essential Dimension of a Counselor's Empathy." *Journal Of Humanistic Counseling* 2013, no. 2 (52).

component, the therapy is fruitless – and it is precisely this feature of treatment (empathy) that is nonexistent in Josh’s imagined meetings with Dr. Hill. Therefore, a therapist observing these hallucinated meetings with Dr. Hill should be careful not to assume that Dr. Hill’s direct and frank way of addressing Josh is actually helping the latter. Furthermore, Dr. Hill does not seem interested in what Josh has to say throughout their therapy sessions. This is a major obstacle that could prevent any psychological interventions from being effective. However regular and frequent the above-mentioned errors might be, there are also a few techniques utilized by Dr. Hill that demonstrate some value. From a narrative point of view, his methods make some sense. Josh never completed his therapy and started to act upon his desires for revenge. The witnessed sessions seem to be an expression of his subconscious, which at the same time introduce psychological tests that gauge fear stimuli for the player of the game.

Dr. Hill’s Methods from a Viewpoint of Psychology. In the initial therapy session, Dr. Hill presents a card to Josh and asks him how the image on the card makes him feel. In this way, the therapist gains valuable insight into some of Josh’s primary fears and anxieties. This process is similar to psychological assessments that are administered by clinical psychologists to gather information vital in establishing a diagnosis pertaining to the patient. In particular, the thematic apperception test (TAT) is a psychological assessment that is administered to clients when more information is hoped to be learned about a client’s mental health status.⁴³ During the TAT, a client is presented with different cards that include various pictures. He or she is then asked to describe the image on the card. Throughout the process, the therapist hopes to learn about ways that the client perceives and interacts with the outside world.⁴⁴

In the remainder of the therapy, Dr. Hill does a good job of not allowing the conversation to become artificial or lacking content. This is a helpful quality for a therapist to have, namely being able to tackle difficult and inconvenient subjects. During his exchanges with Josh, Dr. Hill’s approach was one that was determined to uncover the root of his client’s anxieties. This is not to downplay the fact that there were flaws in how Dr. Hill did this. Oftentimes, the therapist pressured Josh to give him answers to seemingly irrelevant questions. Therefore, for a majority of the time, Dr. Hill seemed to have dictated the course of the therapy in a way that was to his own liking.

⁴³ See M. STEIN, J. SLAVIN-MULFORD, C. SIEFERT, S. SINCLAIR, M. RENNA, J. MALONE, M. BLAIS: “SCORS-G Stimulus Characteristics of Select Thematic Apperception Test Cards.” *Journal Of Personality Assessment* 2014, vol. 96, no. 3.

⁴⁴ See H. MURRAY: *Thematic Apperception Test Manual*. Cambridge, MA 1943.

Overall, while assessing the techniques implemented by Dr. Hill during his sessions with Josh, it can be said that no therapist who conducts treatment in this manner could expect to be effective. Rather, working with a client in the way that Dr. Hill did with Josh, could surely exacerbate his or her symptoms and make them feel guilty, alone, anxious, depressed, and frustrated. Meanwhile, some of the basic ideas incorporated by Dr. Hill could prove to be useful to some extent, if performed in the correct manner. Generally, however, the sessions presented in *Until Dawn* do not comply with real-life therapeutic standards.

Dr. Hill's Methods from a Viewpoint of Rhetoric. In *Until Dawn*, all tests administered by Dr. Hill are calibration methods to adjust fear stimuli. Almost every therapeutic session contains a test that requires the player to communicate either values or fears that drive them. Aristotle wrote in his second book of *Rhetoric* about the nature of fear:

Let fear be defined as a painful or troubled feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain; for men do not fear all evils, for instance, becoming unjust or slow-witted, but only such as involve great pain or destruction, and only if they appear to be not far off but near at hand and threatening, for men do not fear things that are very remote; all know that they have to die, but as death is not near at hand, they are indifferent. If then this is fear, all things must be fearful that appear to have great power of destroying or inflicting injuries that tend to produce great pain. That is why even the signs of such misfortunes are fearful, for the fearful thing itself appears to be near at hand, and danger is the approach of anything fearful.⁴⁵

Following Aristotle's definition of fear as a "feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain,"⁴⁶ it is highly problematic to construct any text that causes fear for potential players, because they "do not fear all evils."⁴⁷ Fear is a highly individualized emotional response. That is why *Until Dawn* employs a mechanics of adapting fear stimuli in accordance with the principle of calibration through the implementation of several tests. The entire procedure is framed as narrative about therapy designed to obfuscate the true pragmatic intension of these ses-

45 ARISTOTLE: *Rhetoric*, 2.5.1-2.5.2.

46 Ibidem, 2.5.1.

47 Ibidem.

sions. The game pretends to ask for the patients' fears, but actually analyzes the gamer. Josh's fears and anxieties may be connected to a plethora of fear stimuli, such as snakes, spiders, and thunderstorms, to name a few. They are not pinned down until a specific choice within a play-through has been made. Thereby, the player of *Until Dawn* reveals her specific fears, in indicating how her fears are represented in the TAT.⁴⁸ The game responds by weaponizing these answers against the player, and includes them in the subsequent gameplay. For example, the player will have to declare if she fears clowns, scarecrows, or zombies the most. Depending on the chosen answer, a booby trap will wear a corresponding mask. The fear stimuli are adjusted to the player's answers and should theoretically increase the experienced level of fear. It must be noted, however, that this mechanism is not without certain degree of limitation. The number of potential stimuli is restricted and therefore especially common causes for fear are used. Nonetheless, it is a first step towards more individualized gaming experience.

Mental Illness Being Portrayed. In order to be rhetorically potent, *Until Dawn* portrays a sufficient representation of mental illness. As the game progresses to the later stages, it becomes apparent that the therapy sessions between Dr. Hill and Josh are not actual meetings, but instead, merely the contents of Josh's hallucinations. Knowing this, one realizes that Josh is not receiving any sort of treatment. Rather, his mental health is deteriorating to the point when he is hallucinating severely. Visual hallucinations usually vary in nature, and can make the individual experiencing them feel as if they are in a context or situation that is completely novel to them.⁴⁹ Even though individuals with schizophrenia are the most prone to experience visual and auditory hallucinations, occurring nearly 70% of the time, it does not mean that individuals suffering from other types of mental illness do not experience hallucinations.⁵⁰

Individuals with psychosis, major depression, PTSD, borderline personality disorder are among those who can experience visual or auditory hallucinations as well.⁵¹ It also pertains to persons who have recently endured a stressful life event, are going through bereavement, or are placed in highly stressful circumstances, to name a few examples. Other causes of hallucinations include sleep

48 See RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: "Until Dawn All Interviews With Dr. Hill" – 00:04:12–00:07:34.

49 See S. CHAUDHURY: "Hallucinations: Clinical aspects and management." *Ind Psychiatry J* 2010, vol. 19, no. 1.

50 See *Ibidem*.

51 See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Arlington 2013 (5th edn.).

deprivation, or abusing psychoactive substances.⁵² Given the nature of the occurrence of visual hallucinations, it is not uncommon for them to be threatening, frightening, or unpleasant.⁵³ In Josh's case, hallucinating about seeing a doctor who eventually starts to curse and heavily criticize him, is not unexpected given the state of intense duress Josh was at the time. Given the fact that hallucinations, in themselves, are distressing for an individual, it is not a surprise that the hallucinations Josh experiences seem a bit intrusive and unpleasant. It would have been somewhat odd to observe Josh's hallucinations with Dr. Hill presented as an enjoyable and welcoming experience for him.

As a brief explanation, research suggests that individuals with a past history of trauma, especially during the earlier years of life, are at an increased risk of experiencing visual hallucinations.⁵⁴ Another explanation of the hallucinations may be Josh's (excessive) consumption of alcohol.⁵⁵ Upon inviting his friends for the weekend, he refers to "partying all weekend." The difficulty arises given Josh's well-documented history of psychosis, since individuals with past history of psychosis are at increased risk for experiencing hallucinations if regularly consuming alcohol, as found in previous research studies.⁵⁶

Potemkin Villages of Surprising Depth. The sessions are Potemkin villages with a deeper meaning. All the presented aspects indicate that the character of Josh (or respectively – the Psycho) are not a mere exaggeration created of stereotypes. Instead, the hallucination's overlay, help to understand the complex matter of Josh's situation. A cautious player will already recognize changes in the environment transpiring in Chapter 3. Over time, the therapist's office becomes decrepit and ramshackle. Tattered curtains replace the regular ones and the window is boarded up with several planks. One may also notice that an increasing number of fear-inducing objects begin to appear in the office.⁵⁷ This symbolizes the ongoing decay of Josh's mental health. Fears discussed in prior sessions start to materialize in the upcoming events.⁵⁸ For instance, if the player

52 See S. CHAUDHURY: "Hallucinations...", pp. 5-12.

53 Ibidem.

54 M. SOLESVIK, I. JOA, T. K. LARSEN, J. LANGEVELD, J. O. JOHANNESSEN, J. BJØRNESTAD, K. BRØNNICK: "Visual Hallucinations in First-Episode Psychosis: Association with Childhood Trauma." *Plos ONE* 2016, vol. 11, no. 5.

55 See Y. DOBRY, L. SHER: "Complex visual hallucinations in a patient with chronic schizophrenia and alcohol dependence: A case report and literature review." *International Journal on Disability and Human Development* 2013, vol. 12, no. 3.

56 Ibidem.

57 See RABIDRETROSPECTGAME: "Until Dawn All Interviews With Dr. Hill" – 00:08:05.

58 Ibidem, 00:08:37.

states that she fears spiders out of a certain selection of animals the most, a large spider in a jar will be positioned on the desk. Different issues find their expression in the room. This constitutes a unique variant of game's artificial intelligence as a *homunculus digitalis*.

Until Dawn's designers created a *homunculus digitalis* that not only responds to the player's decision, but also reflects her character. Provided that the player always responds faithfully to all the questions asked, the room becomes an expression of the combined fears of the player and Josh as her personified representative.⁵⁹ Taking into account the scenario in which the player is unable to play Josh up until the almost the very end of the game, the relationship between the player and him is special. Bound together through the therapy sessions, the game establishes a coupling between Josh's and the player's own fears and thereby creates a procedural bond. The more fear the player attributes to Josh by active game-play choice, the more she actually reflects upon herself. Therefore, the AI executes rules that visualize fear and simultaneously emphasizes a certain degree of likeness between the mentally ill antagonist and the player. The emotional response in a form of judgment or hatred towards Josh is more difficult when he is realized as a digital counterpart who responds to the same fears as oneself. Kenneth Burke once defined the core mission of rhetoric as establishing **consubstantiality**.⁶⁰ **Identification** serves as a strong persuasive means that leads one to believe the argument(s) of another party. Since the *homunculus digitalis* in such an incarnation is literally alike the player, it creates a need to further differentiate between acts, agents, and motives, and prevents a simple good-bad judgment call. In other words, *Until Dawn* – unexpectedly – advocates through its calibration procedures in favor of a balanced approach towards judging the mentally ill.

Beyond the Dawn – The Future of Player Calibrated Games

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of the infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far.

H.P. Lovecraft: *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*

This very mercy described by H.P. Lovecraft is the core premise of *Until Dawn*. As long as the player does not see the correlation between the role of Dr. Hill and upcoming adjustment of fear, the game adjusts the impulses for fear sufficiently. It is surely a large premise, and that is why it ceases to be effective after the initial

⁵⁹ A reasonable assumption, considering that the initial narrative framing suggests that the player is addressed directly and therefore her compliance not only relevant for the fear stimuli adjustment, but for the overall interaction in the first playthrough.

⁶⁰ See K. BURKE: *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA 1969.

playthrough. However, the underlying principle of calibration remains an important cornerstone of the game's rhetoric.

Until Dawn is not a perfect representation of the conduct of psychology, but it is a conscious one. As the present article shows, Dr. Hill's therapy sessions are not entirely helpful to advance Josh's mental recovery. Having learned that the psychiatrist is in fact a hallucination, it became apparent that the therapeutic techniques depicted in the game are only used to introduce a sense of realism. Furthermore, the psychological tests serve as a calibration method to adjust the individual fear stimuli for the player. Their actual impact is certainly limited and hints towards the early stage of these new in-game systems. *Until Dawn* may serve as an indicator of the development of procedural mechanics that try to address the principle of calibration.

The rhetoric of video games is ever evolving. As long as games attempt to communicate to an unknown, obscured audience, they will hardly address the majority of their potential targets. Preventing the violation of the outer *aptum* can be established through consciously crafting a *homunculus digitalis* that is designed to analyze and respond to different addresses with individualized feedback. Acknowledging the unique individual by a product of popular culture certainly seems a distant ideal at this point. However, the creation of mechanics and systems that implement rhetorical principles might allow for even further persuasive impact of video games.

Sven Dwulecki, Arras Khaledi

"I Am Trying to Help You. And This 'Game' You're Playing..."

An Analysis of the Rhetoric behind *Until Dawn's* Psychology

Summary: Video games can adjust their messages to the individual player. Based on the ancient ideal of *aptum*, the authors propose the *principle of calibration*. This new theoretical concept states that games need to adapt to the individual player in order to be most persuasive. *Until Dawn* exemplifies this through the element of reoccurring therapy sessions with psychological tests that serve as a hidden calibration mechanic to adjust fear stimuli to the player. The paper pursues an interdisciplinary approach that analyzes not only *Until Dawn's* rhetoric, but also its depicted conduct of psychology. Therefore, the authors examine the in-game therapy with two different lenses: the first lens examines Dr. Hill's methods as a representation of real-life treatment; while the second lens considers how mental illness is portrayed. Combining both perspectives allows to gain a better understanding of how *Until Dawn* creates powerful statement about psychology and the player's character.

Key words: video games, individual player, conduct of psychology

Sven Dwulecki, Arras Khaledi

« **J'essaie de t'aider. Et ce jeu auquel tu joues...** »

Une analyse de la rhétorique derrière la psychologie de l'*Until Dawn*

Résumé : Les jeux vidéo sont capables d'ajuster leurs messages à des joueurs individuels. À la base de l'idéal ancien d'*aptum*, les auteurs proposent le *principe de calibrage*. Ce nouveau concept théorique exprime l'idée que les jeux doivent adapter afin d'être le plus persuasifs. L'exemple de l'*Until Dawn* en témoigne à travers les sessions thérapeutiques réapparaissantes dont les tests psychologiques servent d'un mécanisme de calibrage camouflé pour le but d'ajuster les stimuli de la peur au joueur. Ainsi, l'article poursuit une approche interdisciplinaire qui est concentrée non seulement sur l'analyse la rhétorique de l'*Until Dawn* mais aussi sur l'examen des thérapies dans-le-jeu sous deux angles différents. Le premier aborde les méthodes du dr Hill comme les représentations du traitement de vie réelle, tandis que le second examine les façons selon lesquelles les maladies mentales se voient dépeintes. La combinaison de ces deux perspectives permet de mieux saisir comment *Until Dawn* réussit à créer une déclaration puissante à propos de la psychologie et du caractère du joueur.

Mots clés : jeux vidéo, joueur individuel, conduite de la psychologie