Storytelling   introduction

Videogames are, in essence, the chance to the player of being another one, as in a realistic world as in a fantastic one, this role of suply someone else is what pushes the player to going forward during the game development.

Visual artwork, environments concept art, shields, suites, weapons and phisical body structures are maybe the first reason to the player to aqquire the game, but what makes him play is the fun he gets from it.

Gameplay, the difficult curve, controls, fluidity, are essential. But there is another chance born from the cinema and the visual storytelling based on time control, camera positioning, and environments composition seens from the point of view of the player that is often underestimated.

The visual storytelling is one of the best weapons great games have used to engage the player and make him feel things, great example of this is the God of War, that since the first release has been an example of how the dynamic camera position can be used to make feel emotions far from the things we can see in the scene.

Making a nice use of the storytelling time and the objects position in the screen we can make the things express emotions no only for what they are, but for where, how, and how big are them in the relation with others.

Storytelling the field of view

The first decision that a visual storyteller must take is to define accurately the field of view of the game.
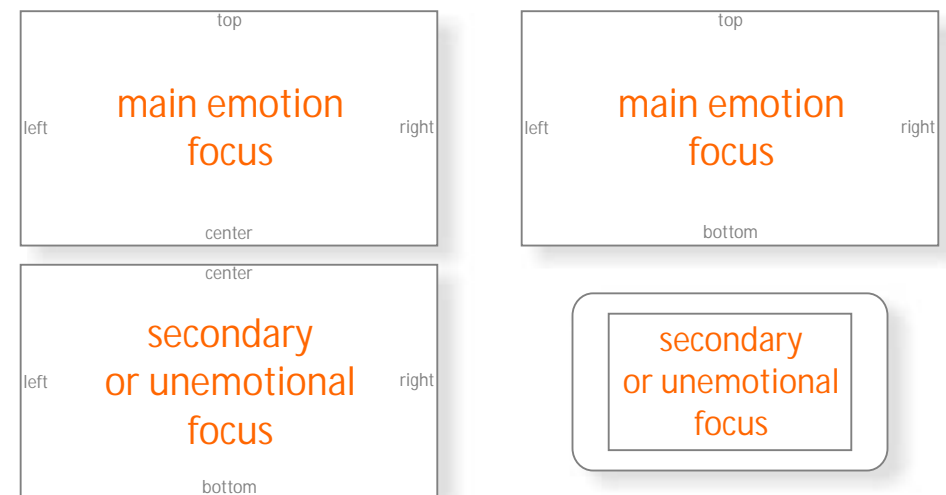
That is not a simple decision, as the field of view is not always only the screen the player has in front. Whatever the player could have between him and the game, even the sourrounding area if the game is based on movements as Kinect, PS move or Wii (U), could affect to the way he feels the emotions of the game.

Recent and more clear examples of it are the dual screen based videogames, where the field of view is divided in two focus, or we could see it as a doubled field of view, with different cappabilities of engaging and emotion expressing.

Even though for the basic theory we are going to limit the trouble to just one screen as the other situations must be taken seriously but the rules of communication are the same.

top

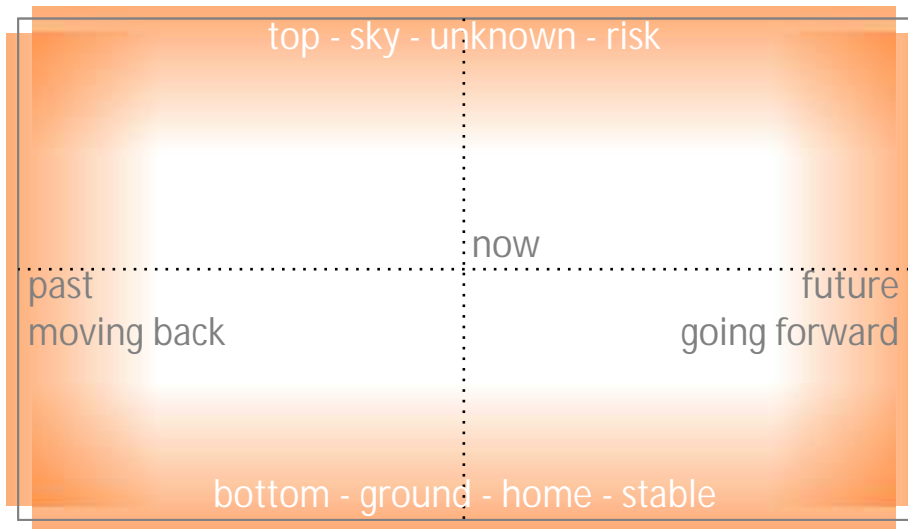left   right

bottom

The basic field of view we are going to work with, delimited as a squared area that can be divided in coordinates like top, bottom, left and right. rules in this field of view are simple and are the basis we are going to learn.

top
left   **main emotion focus**   right
center

top
left   **main emotion focus**   right
bottom

center
left   **secondary or unemotional focus**   right
bottom

secondary or unemotional focus

Fields of view of nintendo consoles N3DS and WII U, also can be included here Ps4 with sony devices connected as screens of augmented experience.

Storytelling the field of view

top - sky - unknown - risk

now

past
moving back

future
going forward

bottom - ground - home - stable

The field of view can be roughly divided in emotional areas based on the physical way we human perveice the world. Things on top of the field of view are sensed as sky, unknown, and risk, as the bottom is felt as home, ground and stable.

The right side is felt as the forward going of the time, and the left one is the past or the beginning of something. Just based on that simple rules an element placed-on or looking-at inside the field of view will unavoidably express something relating to that perception.

Following this simple rules, something moving in the upper right direction is escaping from the present searching the unknown (composition used often by airlines advertising) and something just walking to the left is bringing steps back to the past.

The reasons to that perception are mainly two: the physical perception of the human that will associate always bottom with floor and top with sky, and the order we read: from left to right, the small time the vision needs to go across the field of view is enough to give a time advance of the story told on it. The story told on a field of view is going to be as long as the time we need to pierce it until we get the right side and "exit".

beginning

end

time spent on the flight = story timelapse
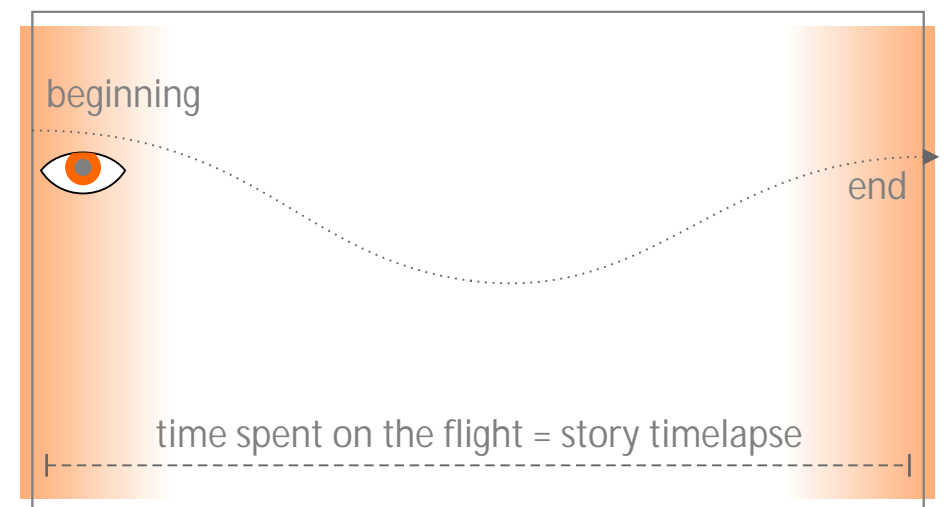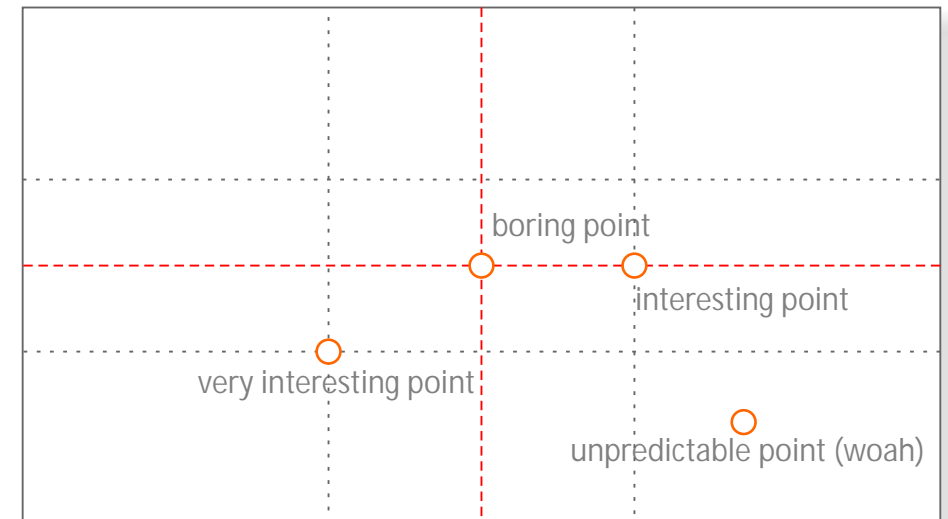
Storytelling   the point and it's position
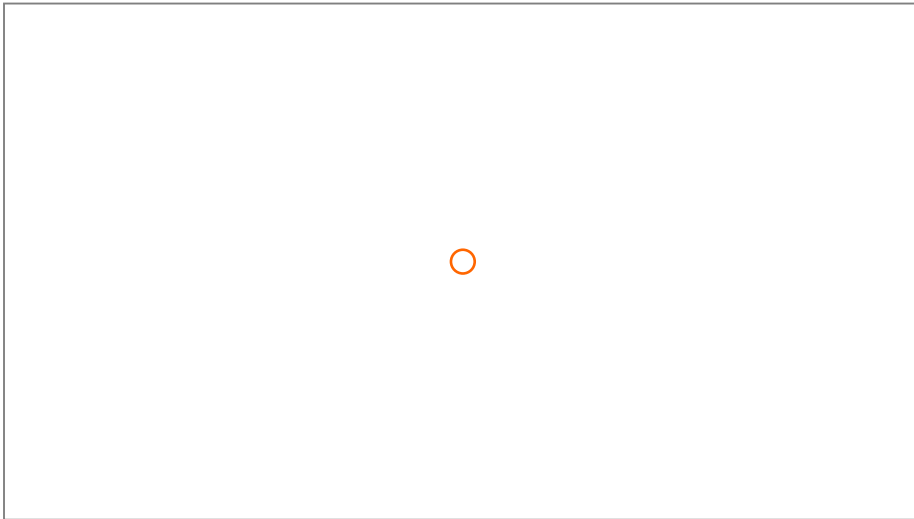
The first communication atom in the visual storytelling is the point, a point is a so powerful tool to take the attention of the viewer, as a point placed somewhere calls to be seen, and to don't stop seeing it, as a focus.

Where the point is placed affects to the perception we have about it, a point placed on the left is beggining a story, a point placed in the right side is finishing an story untold yet.

the beginning of a journey

the end of something
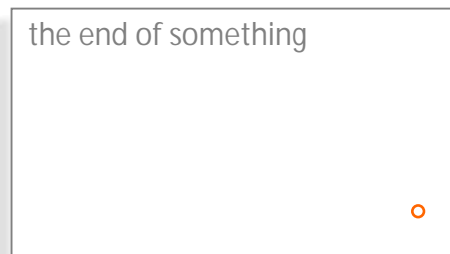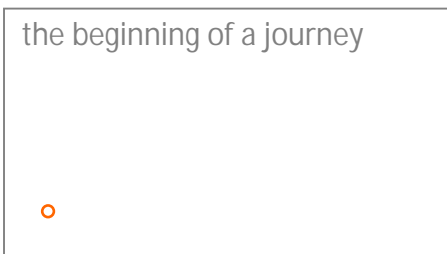
There are more interesting points than others, and it's based on their position, the view distributes the field dividing it following two basic rules, the middles and the thirds. Everything placed out of those guides will call the attention more than something placed on the intersections.

boring point

interesting point

very interesting point

unpredictable point (woah)

The more predictable points can be sensed as the starrings of the composition as the perception will assign them the role of "more stables" and as the "role I would like to play".

boring portrait

cool portrait
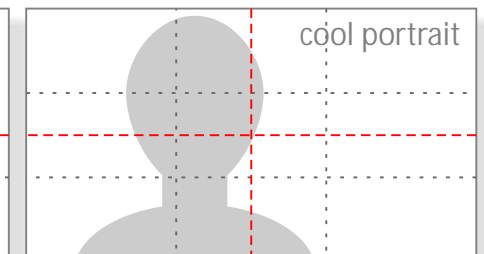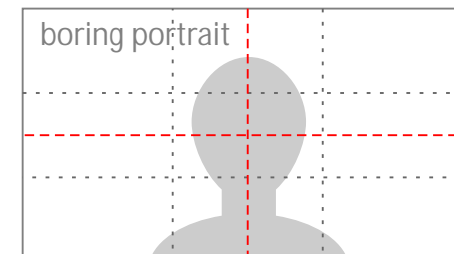
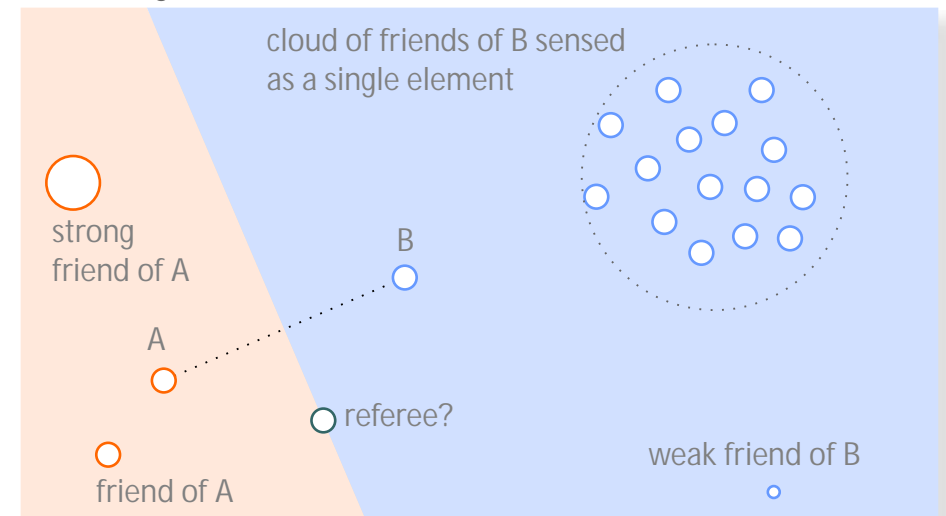# Storytelling   the point and the second point (making things exciting)

The second atom in the visual storytelling is not the second point, but the line. The line is the connection two points make, is so powerful as those points placed in a filed of view act as a line and make our view start playing "pong" from the point one to the point two once and once again.
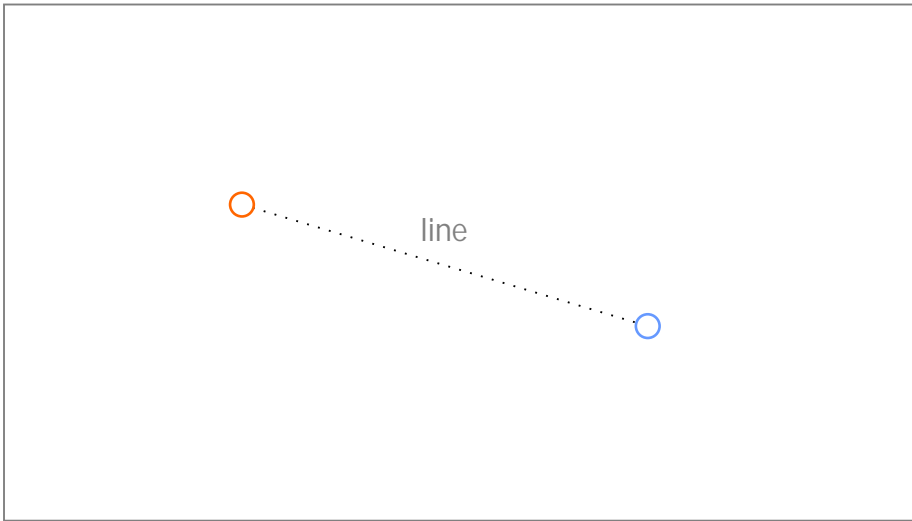
line

Lines also make divisions in the field of view, the half part of the first point is sensed as the "first point territory", and the second one is sensed as the "territory of the other". Is easy to see than any element placed on the scene can be identified as "belonging to one point", "belonging to the other", stable, unknown, time forwarding, or time backwarding".


A
friend of B
line
B
friend of A
observer?
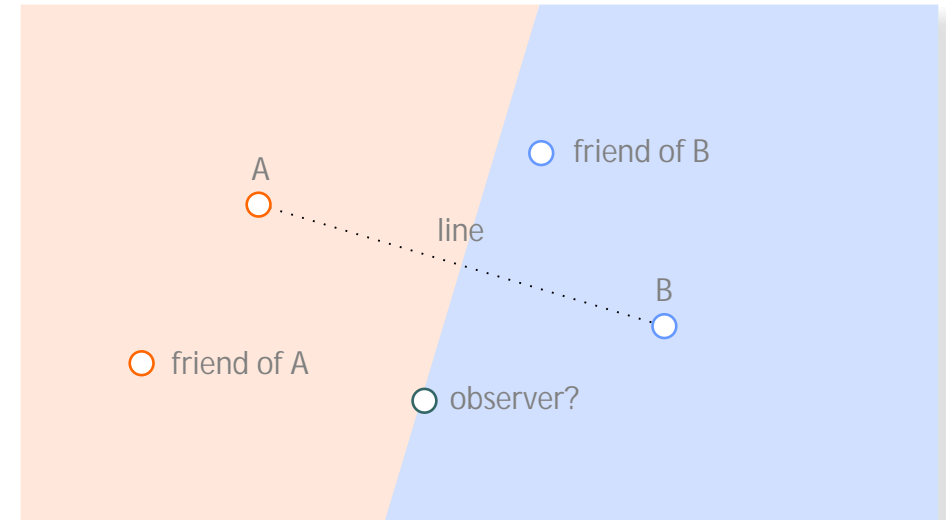
The height, size of the areas and size of the points affect to the dominance of any of them over the others, also the weight, so we can define starrings, allies. An aggrupation of points can also tell something about the dominance.

cloud of friends of B sensed as a single element
strong friend of A
B
A
referee?
friend of A
weak friend of B

Storytelling   dominance, the shape and why villains are sharp

We can also use shapes to make elements more important in the field of view. Easy and soft shapes are associated to predictable ones, and sharp elements are associated as unestable, unpredictable and cutting. Mind uses to associate those second perceptions to evil (as the stable ones are sensed as "me").

A   B
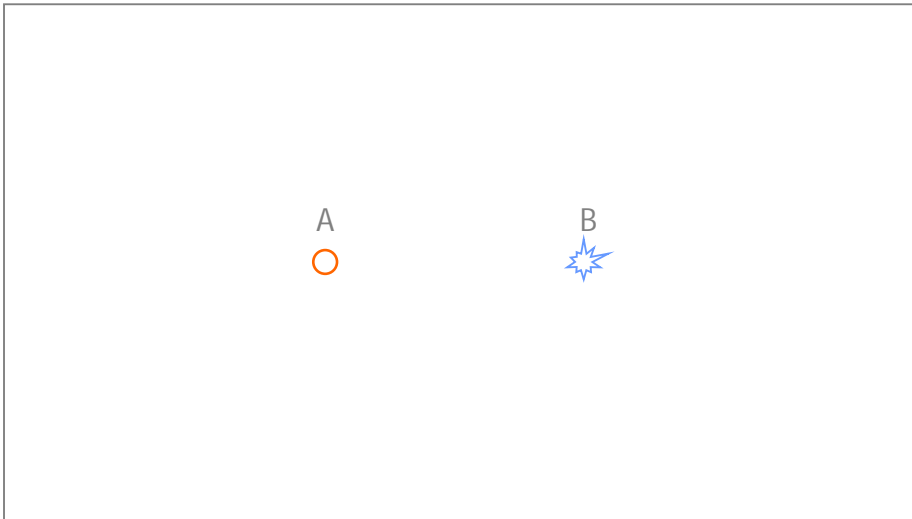
Having two elements with the same height, width and position, sight will find more attractive and interesting the one less predictable. Even though, will associate himself with the more predictable one and define the other as a rival.

A

friend of B?

B

friend of A?
be suspicious...   observer?
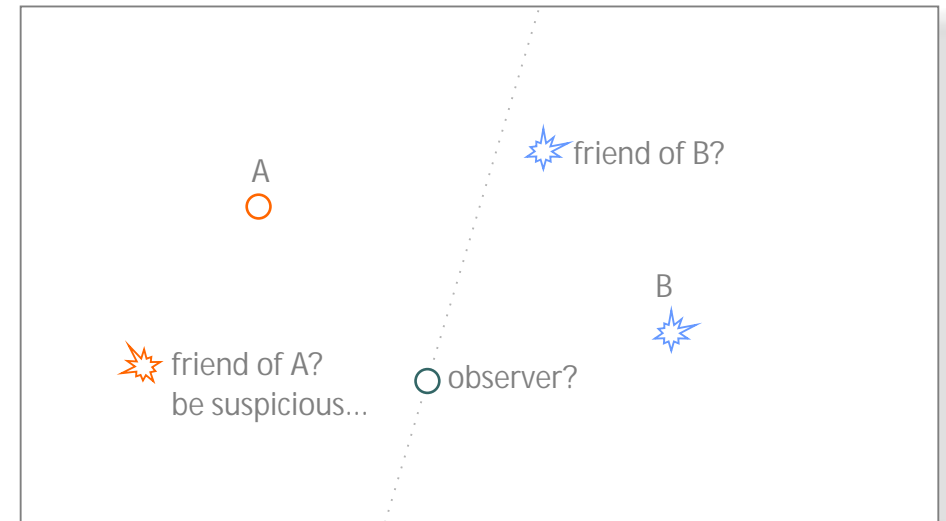
With the size we also can tell stories and make feel emotions, and we also can make conflicting situations, where dominant characters face to lots of small ones, but that make a wider group in the field of view.

an easy fight

oh my god...

Storytelling   the view path

The first thing that the vision is going to do with a field of view is noticing if this field of view has something interesting, we must suppose of course it does, (as the player is playing for some reason) and then will go on flowing through all the elements in order. So it will describe a path that has an impact on how do it senses all the scene, possibly missing some of the elements thanks to different tricks.

We can use blocks of elements that will acts as a phisical barrier and will guide the view through the field making longer the story or making different feelings about it (as depression, wilderness...).

If we use a composition where the view has no escape we tell that is an oppresive one, used for making feel the starring of the composition depressed also and a composition based on curves can create and infinite loop-feeling that awakes the obsession on the viewer, and so, the perception of an "obsessive situation".

These barrers can also be shapes drawn in the composition, clouds, vegetation, ground shapes, mountains... all those lines will be followed by the view drawing a path, that will be sensed as an history with a beginning and an end (or a non ending one).

How to control how long this timelapse is (seconds, days or a life) will be a matter we will deal later.
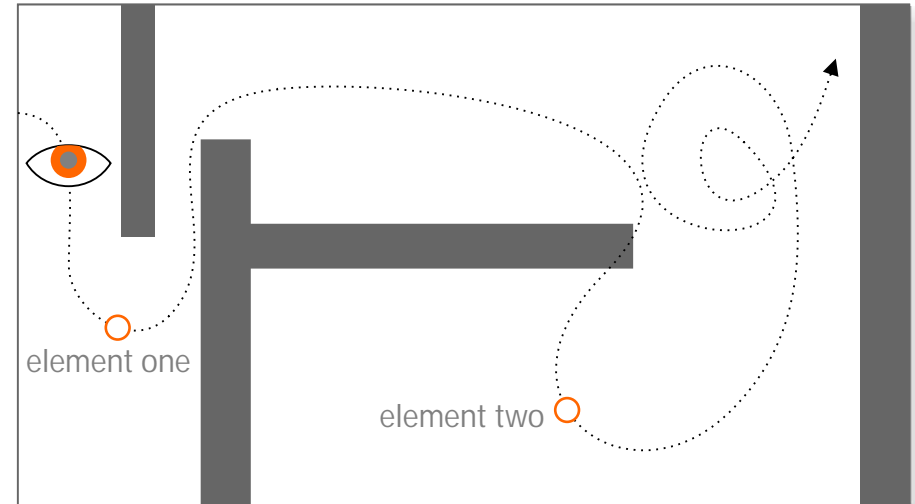
The view avoid the bareers wating for the corresponding time to view all the elements on the scene, the bareer in the end of the composition gives a perception of non exit and a history difficult to finish.
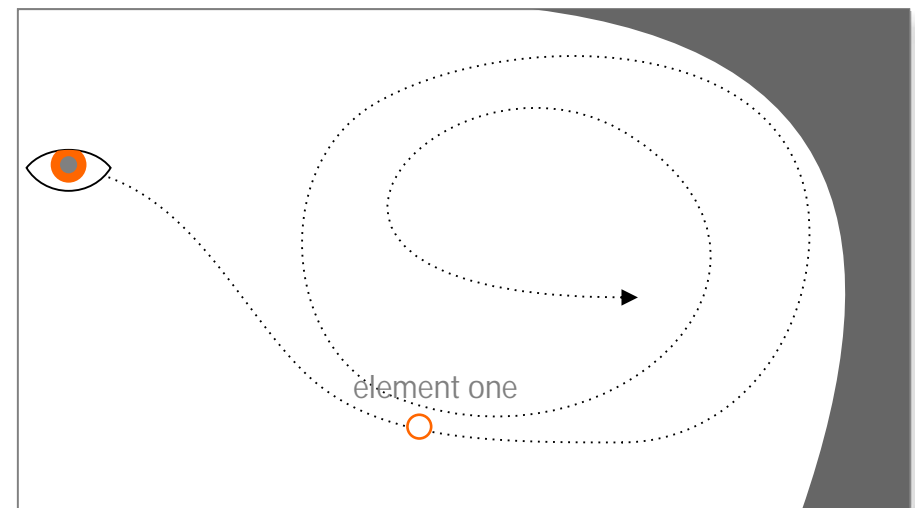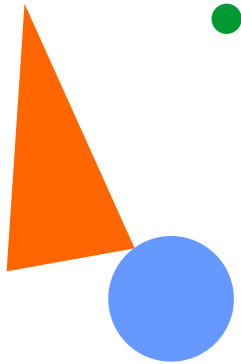

The imposibility to escape and the looping shape of the "final bareer" makes feel the starring enclosed in a situation very difficult to solve.
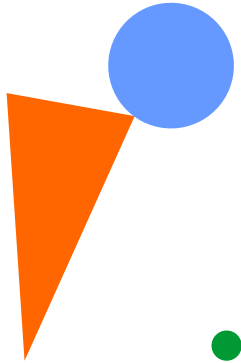
Storytelling   the field of view also has gravity

Gravity also exists in the field of view, so is not the same perception in the following two scenes, be aware of it and use it.

shapes

the end of "green"

to think about...

With all those basic tips, we can see that being an storyteller is not being a good drawer, is just a matter of being a good observer, knowing what emotion do we want to express and positioning elements interacting between them following the rules of the field of view.

Visual communication is so powerful and it doesn't affect only to planar illustration as graphic design or artworks for covers and posters, it also can be used wisely for moving camera around the starring of a videogame changing the emotional perception the player has about the scene, making the starring dominant in weight even being smaller than the opponent(s) moving the camera to the floor, collapsing the starring under a cloud of points moving the camera to the sky and using the advance or the backwarding of the time knowing the importance of left and right areas of the screen.

Storytelling   narrative compositions

The illustration. Is the first fully narrative composition. It grows from the basis that a simple field of view is able to tell a story (as we've already seen). The view enters in the composition and uses it as the full narrative timelapse, understanding the story as well as the illustrator did it.

The Storyboard. Is a composition based on compositions same sized placed in time order, is the basis of the cinema (and in addition of the videogames). Every of them could be considered as an illustration and follows the same rules of the field of view, the difference is that the illustrations not only has to work with itself, but they have to do it with the previous and the following ones. Composition and color changes between them will affect to the perception the espectator will have of the history generating what

is called "shot", wich is the item between two composition changes.

The strip/comic page. The composition is based on differents shots the same than the storyboard, the difference is that all these shots must to live toguether in a first sight full composition not dissapearing and leaving all the field of view free for next ones. That implies that all the rules for guiding the view path must be followed thinking of showing and hiding the information inside the page. We can consider it as an illustration of illustrations.

Storytelling   the ellipsis and the closure

The closure is the psycological phenomenom that happens when some incomplete information is given to our minds. When our perception takes two event supposedly associated (as they are supposed in storytelling) is inmediately going to try to fill all the information gaps between them.

That's the reason because when we are seeing a movie and a man is shown in his room and then the same man is shown in an office, we assume that he has waken up, dressed up, driven to the office and started to work. Unless some information denying that reasoning is shown from the narrative, we are going to accept many of the script just based on our lives, our experience, plots with the same structure, etc.

For a storyteller is very very important to know that is not necessary to show everything to the spectator, as most of the things could be easily intuit with minimum pieces of information. The good storyteller is the one who only gives the necessary information, letting the observer participate in the reasoning of the parts that are not shown.

A storyteller must have all the time in his mind what "the spectator thinks that he knows" about a script. Because if there's something missing is necessary to be told soon or later, and knowing that is a very strong weapon to guide the observer through the plot denying

or not that information. By example: If we show a man and a woman in the bed the observer will deffinitely assume they are couple. If in the next scene we show the woman kissing a different man the spectator will begin to make questions about the plot. "Is that the same woman or a twin? Are we in the same story time? does the man in the first scene know that she is with someone else?" and will try to fill the plot with the most probable answer. If then we show the man with another woman then the observer will even accept that everything could be a dream.

In that moment storyteller is able to play with the mind of the observer and manipulate the perception to have power over his emotions.

The ellipsis is everything that happens between one shot and the following one. Is the time between different shots and it activates inmediately the closure of the spectator. In this example, when we realize both characters are talking by phone we assume they are speaking with themselves, and we don't pretend they are speaking with someone else or living in different times.
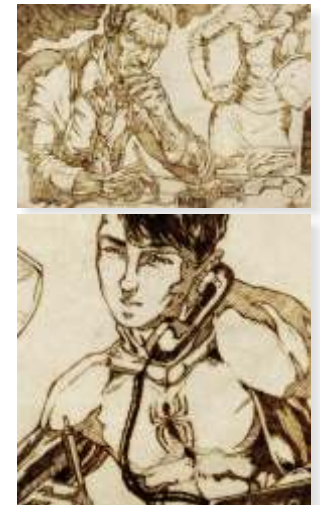
Storytelling   the different kind of shots

 We have a couple of kind of shots to begin our narrative. They are based on how close or far is the camera from the center of interest in the view. At the same time different shots are often used to different perceptions as we feel "closer" to the character as closer as we look.

Extremelly wide shot. Is used to show a wide environment where the action is going to happen. Is a descriptive resource to place the spectator in the scene. It's emotionally meaningless.
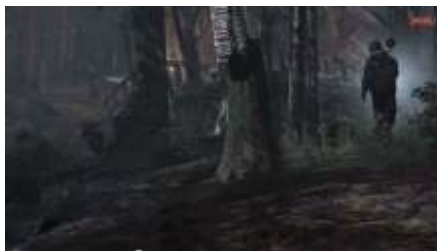

Arkham Knight

The last of us

The Elder Scrolls online

Very wide shot. Is closer to the point of interest. So it's centered on something. It links emotionally the spectator with the point of interest, often a character or some kind of situation meaningfull to the plot.

Tomb Raider definitive edition

Silent Hills

Hellblade

Wide shot. It shows all the character we are centering the plot in. Full bodied for seeing all its concept, dresses and furniture. It links the spectator directly to the character, and opens the emotional interaction.

The Elder Scrolls online

Tekken 5

Metal Gear Solid 5

Storytelling   the different kind of shots

American shot. Born in the western movies this shot approach more the character, letting see the movement of his hands and his body from a closer point of view than the wide shot.

Metal Gear Solid 5

Dragonball Xenoverse

Tomb Raider definitive edition

Mid shot. As close as we go to the character higher will be the emotional link to the observer. In this shot we can see the face, the hand movement and we can feel the emotions of the focus of the point of view.

Metal Gear Solid 5

The Division

The Elder Scrolls online

Close up. We use this shot when we directly want to link emotions and express rage, tenderness, love, ungry... as it's like being so close to the character.

Assassins Creed Unity

The Division

The last of us

Extremelly close up. We place the spectator in a kiss-distance to the character, so the emotion transmission is complete, used to identificate with the character or even feel drama, rage, hate or love.

Hellblade

The Elder Scrolls online

Dead Island 2

Storytelling the different kind of shots

Cut in shot. Is the same shot than the Extremely close up but oriented to non character objects. Weapon, scenery...

Arkham Knight

Tekken 7

The Division

Multiplane shot. We use this shot to give more than one emotion, or combine more than just one type of shots, it brings more dimensions to the story using different depths in the same point of view.

Metal Gear Solid 5

Tekke 7

The Assembly

Cenital/Utter shot. An aerial view used often to confuse the spectator, as is a plane with a very unusual the point of view. Used from the bottom is called Utter shot.

Assassins Creed Unity

The Witcher 3

Dark souls 2

Storytelling   the ellipsis and the moment to moment

Through the ellipsis we can control the time of the narrative. We can make longer and shorter ellipsis, change the narrative thread, change to another character, go back in time, etc. Every of them will cause a different feeling in the player or spectator, will cause a different kind of closure and will imply him more or less in the plot.

Moment to moment. It is used to show an advance of the narrative time. Shows different actions one next to the other where is important when do happen every of them. All of them are related to the same narrative thread and there is no scene change.

Assassins Creed Unity

Storytelling action to action

Action to action. This is the classical sequence we can use before an action scene, we see the preparation of the scene showing different things that the character does. We don't matter the order of the things, so there is not necessary a secuential order. It is used often to stop the narrative time.

Dead Island 2

Storytelling scene to scene

Scene to scene. Is the same structure that the moment to moment narrative. It is used to make the time go forward, but in higher steps, just because what happens in the elypsis is not important, or because it is and we want the closure of the spectator to act. We also follow the same narrative field and characters in every of them.
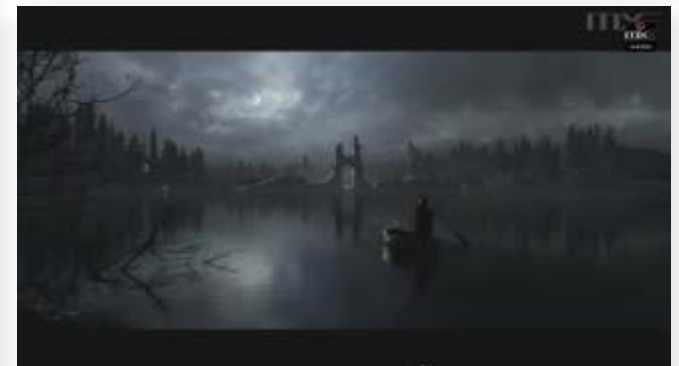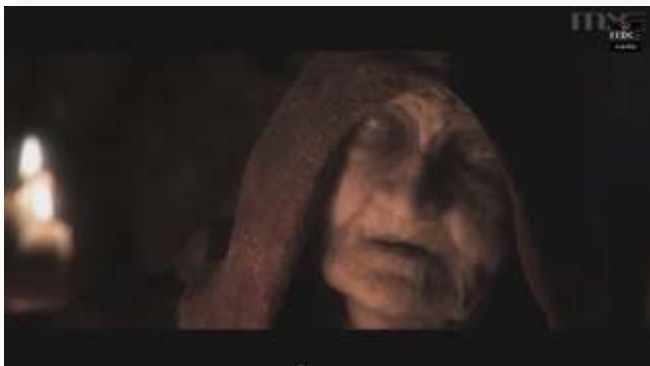
Storytelling   aspect to aspect

Aspect to aspect. It's used to show different things that happen at the same time in an definited environment. We use the same estructure that in the "action to action", so the time sequence is not important as it usefull to stop the time and add drama before some important event. Is very used in the eastern narrative school as it brings a very emotional link.
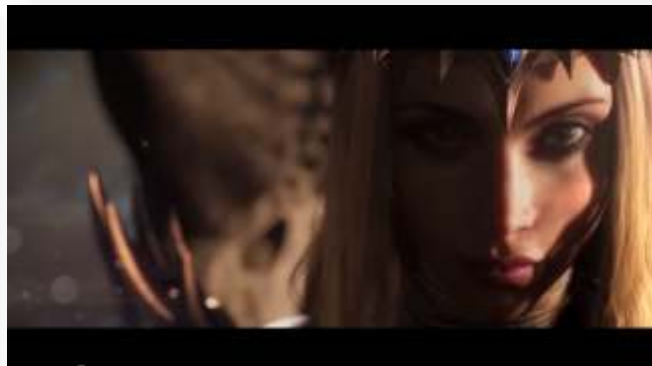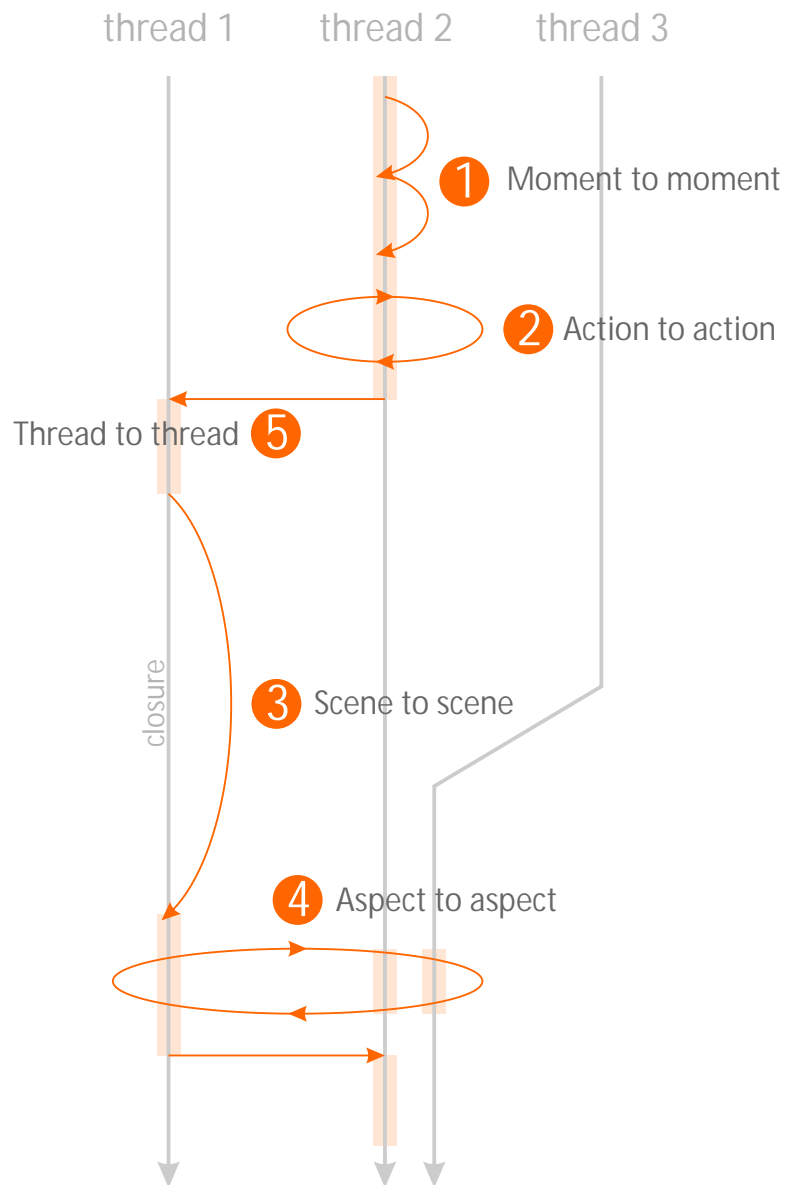
Storytelling   thread to thread

Thread to thread. We call an elypsis "thread to thread" when we completelly change the narrative thread. Is used often in multi characters stories to change the focus from one to another. So there is possibly time, and character changing.

Dark souls 2

Storytelling   a little overview of the ellypsis

thread 1   thread 2   thread 3

① Moment to moment

② Action to action

Thread to thread ⑤

closure

③ Scene to scene

④ Aspect to aspect

to think about...

① Moment to moment. Time linked in short steps. Same narrative thread. Makes the spectator live the same that the starring. Generates affinity.

② Action to action. No time linked. Same narrative thread. Makes the spectator to pay attention.

③ Scene to Scene. Time linked in high steps. Same narrative thread. Makes the spectator live the same that the starring. Generates affinity.

④ Aspect to aspetc. No time linked, stops the time. Very high emotional linking. Many narrative threads involved.

⑤ Thread to thread. No time linked. Changes completelly the narrative thread and it's starrings.

Storytelling   the different ways to use visual and listening threads

Born from the comic industry often we have the chance of making narratives with support text or audio. There are many ways to mix those two narrative channels to emphatize, add or distort information threads.

Based on text compositions. There is no visual thread or the thread is no relevant to the story.

Based on image. The audio or text thread is just music, irrelevant or unexisting.

Dual compositions. Both audio/text and visual are from different narrative threads. There does'nt have to be any link between them and they can even be placed in different storytimes, is one of the most powerful ways to bring more and more information to the customer about the script.

Additive. Both audio/text and visual threads are in the same one, adding its emotional link to emphatize the story.

Montage. Used so often to make huge time forwarding. It uses to be music over a composition of shots that can cover months, years, one live or even centuries.