

Jagoda discusses the concept of "video game sensorium" and how video games shape perception, affect, and cognition through their unique combination of mechanics, aesthetics, and interactivity. This idea highlights how games condition player experience by blending procedural logic, audiovisual design, and embodied engagement, creating new ways of sensing and interpreting virtual worlds. *Braid* exemplifies this concept by merging its core mechanics with its narrative, encouraging players to engage in both logical problem-solving and deeper interpretative thinking.

At the heart of *Braid* is its core game loop, which consists of movement, time manipulation, puzzle-solving, and narrative discovery. On the surface, the player controls Tim, a character who navigates various levels by running, jumping, and interacting with objects. However, unlike traditional platformers, death is not a failure state in *Braid*. Instead of restarting from a checkpoint, players can rewind time at will, undoing mistakes and reattempting actions in a way that fundamentally changes how they interact with the game world. This mechanic is more than just a convenience but it transforms the gameplay into an experiment in trial, error, and discovery.

As the game progresses, each world introduces new time-based mechanics that challenge conventional expectations. Some levels feature objects that are immune to time reversal, forcing players to think strategically about their movements. Others manipulate time based on the player's position, creating puzzles where movement itself controls the flow of time. These mechanics encourage players to abandon simple cause-and-effect logic in favor of a more fluid and dynamic approach to problem-solving. In doing so, *Braid* blurs the line between gameplay and puzzle-solving, turning each level into a cerebral challenge rather than a mere test of reflexes. This gradual transformation of player perception aligns with Jagoda's argument that games shape cognition by immersing players in new forms of logic and interaction.

Beyond its mechanics, *Braid* also subverts traditional narrative expectations. The game's story unfolds gradually through cryptic text interludes, offering fragmented glimpses into Tim's past. At first, players assume they are on a noble quest to rescue a princess, much like in *Super Mario Bros.*, but as the game progresses, this assumption is increasingly challenged. The final sequence delivers a shocking reversal: rather than being the hero, Tim is revealed to be the pursuer, with the princess desperately trying to escape from him. This twist recontextualizes everything the player has done, turning what seemed like a straightforward adventure into a meditation on obsession, regret, and manipulation. In this way, *Braid* not only plays with mechanics but also deconstructs the traditional hero's journey, reinforcing Jagoda's idea that video games can serve as artistic and philosophical inquiries rather than merely structured play experiences.

One of the most striking aspects of Braid's experimental design is its seamless integration of mechanics and narrative. Time manipulation is not just a tool for solving puzzles but it serves as a metaphor for Tim's emotional state, reflecting his desire to undo past mistakes. The player's ability to rewind time provides a sense of control, yet this control is ultimately illusory, as the game's final reveal forces them to confront the consequences of their actions in an entirely new light. This blending of mechanics and meaning is rare in traditional game design, making Braid a prime example of how games can push the boundaries of storytelling.

Another experimental aspect of Braid is its approach to player agency. Unlike games that present a clear path to victory, Braid does not offer explicit answers but instead invites players to interpret its meaning for themselves. Some see it as a story about relationships and regret, while others view it as an allegory for the Manhattan Project and the moral weight of scientific discovery. This openness to interpretation extends the game's reach beyond its mechanics, transforming it into an interactive puzzle that prompts players to think critically about time, agency, and consequence. By challenging conventional notions of success and resolution, Braid embodies the experimental nature of video games that Jagoda describes, showing how the medium can create profound and thought-provoking experiences.

This fluidity of meaning was also highlighted in the interview the class watched, where the discussion brought up the idea that players often take away messages and interpretations that differ from what the designers originally intended. Players may focus on unexpected elements of a game, sometimes missing what the developers saw as key themes while instead finding meaning in smaller or more ambiguous details. As a designer, I believe it is important to leave space for player interpretation, ensuring that the narrative remains flexible and open-ended. However, when a game has a central theme or message that is crucial to its storytelling, I believe the designer should carefully balance subtlety with intentionality. Major themes should not be so obscure that players fail to engage with them altogether. Instead, thoughtful and cautious design choices should guide the player toward the intended themes without forcing a single interpretation.

With this awareness, I have reconsidered how Open conveys its themes through narrative. To make the game's overarching story and message more accessible, I have structured the different endings to feature distinct narrators and also avoided relying on a uniform flashback to the fire incident backstory. Each ending will present a slightly altered version of the past (including the fire, the mother's death, Minty's death, and perhaps also Wally's death), depending on who is telling the story. For example, in the Escape Ending, an old man, who may or may not be Wally or Ed, narrates the story, adding an element of ambiguity. In the Arrested Ending, Wally tells the story, presenting his perspective on Ed's

fate. Meanwhile, in the Successful Kill Wally Ending, Ed himself serves as the narrator in the police station, allowing players to hear his version of events directly. This approach ensures that Open retains its experimental and psychological depth while also making its key messages more perceptible to players.

Jagoda's notion of the video game sensorium can also be applied to my game Open, your game. Like Braid, Open challenges player expectations by subverting traditional mechanics and narrative structures, using the very act of play to encourage deeper interpretative thinking. Rather than merely guiding players through a linear story, Open uses gameplay itself as a means of shaping interpretation and perception, compelling the player to unknowingly inhabit a role they do not initially understand.

At its core, Open follows a seemingly straightforward game loop: exploring the house, gathering clues, completing tasks, and uncovering the past. However, this loop is deceptive. What begins as a simple goal, delivering food to a locked-up younger brother, gradually transforms into an unraveling of identity and truth. The player, believing they are Minty, is constrained by Wally's strict rules, reinforcing a sense of controlled agency similar to how Braid initially conditions the player to believe they are on a hero's journey. Just as Braid's mechanics slowly challenge the player's perception of time and consequence, Open's environmental storytelling and restricted choices guide the player toward the realization that they are not Minty at all but they are Ed. This experiential deception ties directly to Jagoda's argument that experimental games do more than just present a structured narrative, and they create a process through which players discover meaning. In my game, players are encouraged to reflect on their role in the story and the assumptions they have made along the way. The sketch for the game loop is here: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGjEWPmjzl/jFF5HADnRP4xo07g3KA7tA/edit?utm_content=DAGjEWPmjzl&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton

Moreover, Open also embraces the experimental nature of video games by questioning player agency. Open creates a world where the player's actions are both meaningful and constrained. The game's multiple endings, which include escape, suicide, or arrest, offer choices, but none provide a clear resolution. This ambiguity echoes Jagoda's idea that experimental games should challenge normative gaming structures, resisting simple success or failure. Instead of delivering a singular, satisfying outcome, Open leaves the player to wrestle with the weight of their choices, much like how Braid leaves players contemplating the implications of Tim's pursuit.