

Sample Twine/link game analysis

Name: (Your Name Here)

Team Name: (Your Twine/Link project team name)

Section: Wednesday 11, Cameron Alston

Game Name: howling dogs

What fiction or personal memory does your game aim to present? [20–50 words]

“howling dogs” uses a sequence of dreams or simulations to explore different ways women have been and continue to be imprisoned through physical, social, religious, and other constructs.

What is the player’s role in your game (e.g., a character, someone shifting the actions of multiple characters, or a disembodied observer)? [20–50 words]

The player also seems to be imprisoned, trapped in some kind of slowly-deteriorating virtual reality experiment and forced to live and relive these stories each day, becoming each sequence’s main character.

What different refinements of the linking logic are present in your game? What actions do they enable for the player? [100–150 words]

The game uses different kinds of linking logics for different aesthetic effect. One common technique is dividing a long passage up into a series of smaller passages, each containing the text of the prior one and linked together through a single word, often stopping mid-sentence. This uses linking to create pacing, since the tendency is to read these moments as a pause for emphasis on the linking word.

Another kind of link logic used is to link words in the middle of a paragraph to descriptions of things or how the player feels about them, with a single link back to the prior passage. Links representing choices that move the story forward are usually put in their own paragraph at the bottom of the passage. This convention helps players distinguish between observation and action, giving them more control over the pace of the story.

What other logics (e.g., resource logics, pattern-matching logics) are employed, if any? What are their roles? How do they connect to your uses of linking logics? [1–150 words]

Resources are used in the frame story to help create the aesthetic effect of an endless stay in a deteriorating prison, through the use of several variables. A day counter, the state of the machines, and cleanliness level of yourself and the room are all tracked. Since the machines inevitably break down and start increasing the level of filth, these basic resource logics create a “procedural rhetoric” (Bogost) of slow deterioration, and an aesthetic of a growing feeling of disgust.

An interesting pattern-matching logic is used during the sequence where you become a child empress. At a festival, the screen fills with an overwhelming description of the dozens of diversions and entertainments. Only through careful reading can you find the one thing that's out of place and discover a hidden branch of story. This uses a linking logic to create a dynamic of "hunting" for the right link to click, which produces an aesthetic similar to scanning a crowd for something out of place.

What possible shapes does a playthrough of your game have? How do the different shapes relate to player actions through linking (and other) logics? [100–150 words]

The overall structure of the piece mirrors its theme of imprisonment: there are six ordered sequences the player must move through, each linked by a return visit to the VR prison, with only one significant way to break from this pattern (discussed below). The player has choices within some sequences that can affect their outcomes, but many sequences intentionally limit or ignore the player's choices to make an aesthetic point. For example, in the second sequence, regardless of your choices your character always kills her husband. This creates a dynamic where the player feels helpless to alter the course of events, and therefore an aesthetic connection to a character who feels she has no other choice than to act as she does. The existence of links offering alternatives uses link logics to subvert an expectation of agency, making the sequence aesthetically different from a purely linear story with no such expectations.

What different conceptions of the fiction or memory, and its meaning, are suggested by the different shapes of possible playthroughs? [100–150 words]

Moving through the mostly linear shape of the play experience invites the player to reflect on the prisons of all kinds that women have been placed in, much as Liam Burke's "Dog Eat Dog" invites players to reflect on colonialist power structures by asking players to reenact them. The one major break from this linear shape colors this interpretation in an interesting way. In the sequence with the child empress, some (perhaps even most) players may not discover the single link in the overwhelming festival scene that leads to a sequence where the empress tries to escape her fate. By this late in the game, players may have been "trained" to not expect their actions to have significant consequences: they've internalized a sense of futility in response to the game's systems. Players who do discover this option might interpret its existence as a call to fight against relentlessly oppressive systems that instill this kind of helplessness.

[Note: "howling dogs" is available to play here:

<http://aliendovecote.com/uploads/twine/howlingdogs/howlingdogs.html>]