



The Play of Stillness

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The Problem with Interactivity



Interactivity is a thing that games can DO.



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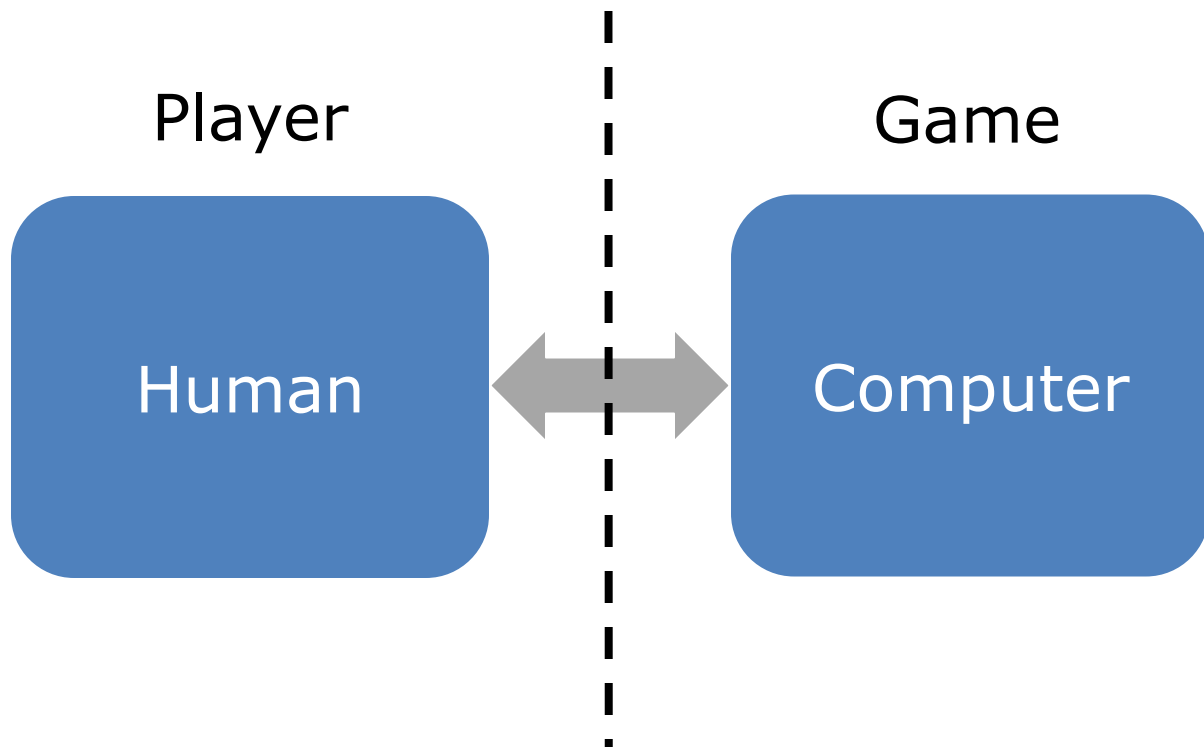
It's not what games ARE.

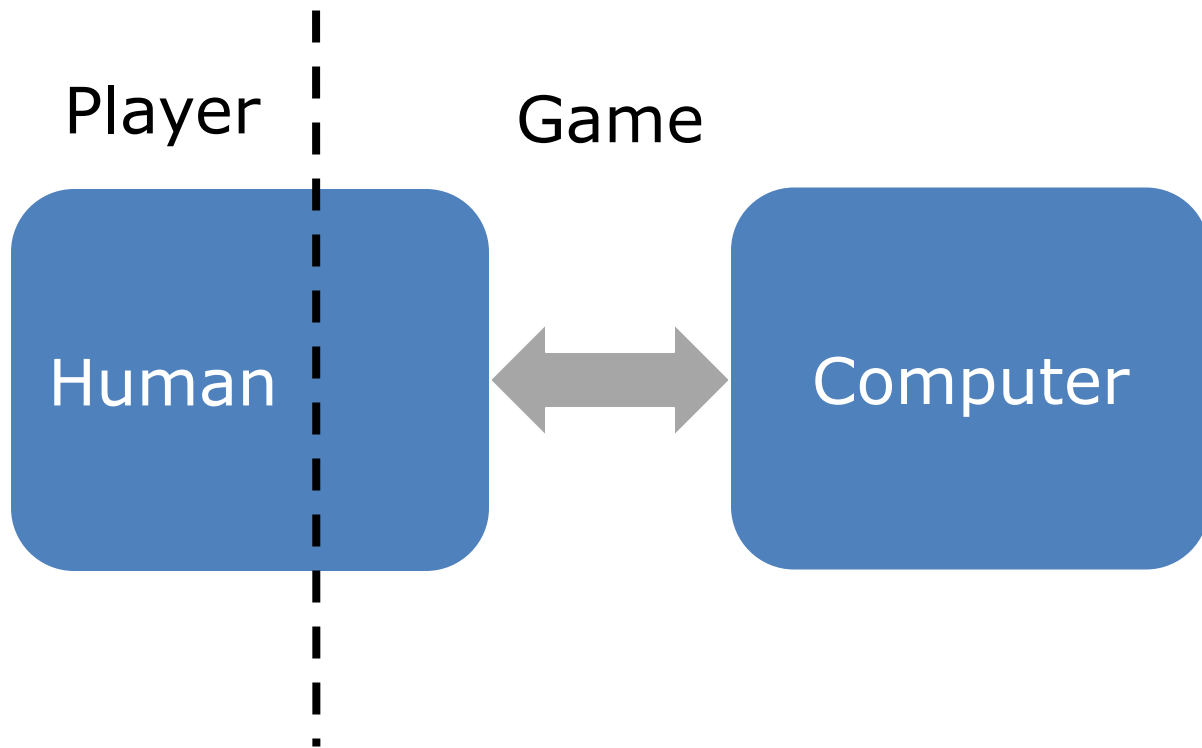


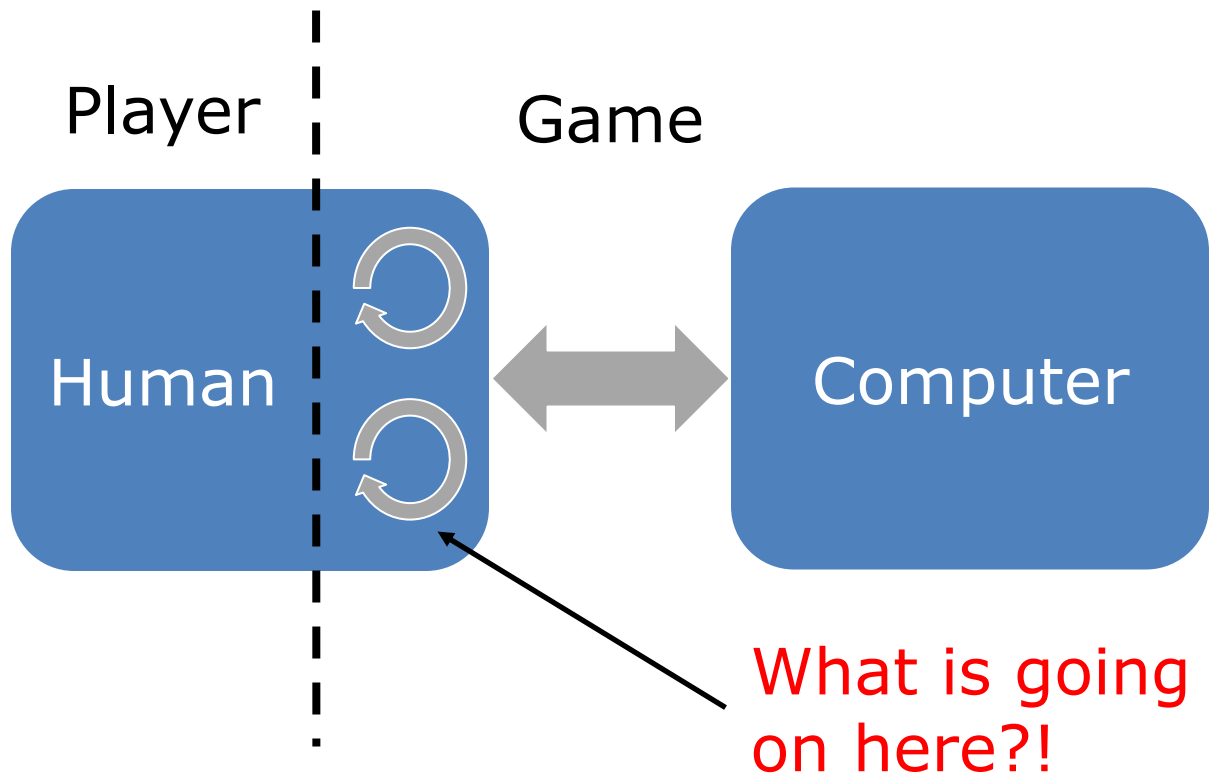




- Cuts are a thing that films can DO
- They're not what films ARE









A new design methodology

- Non-interactive play
- Design heuristics
- Case studies



Why are turn-based games fun?





Anticip...



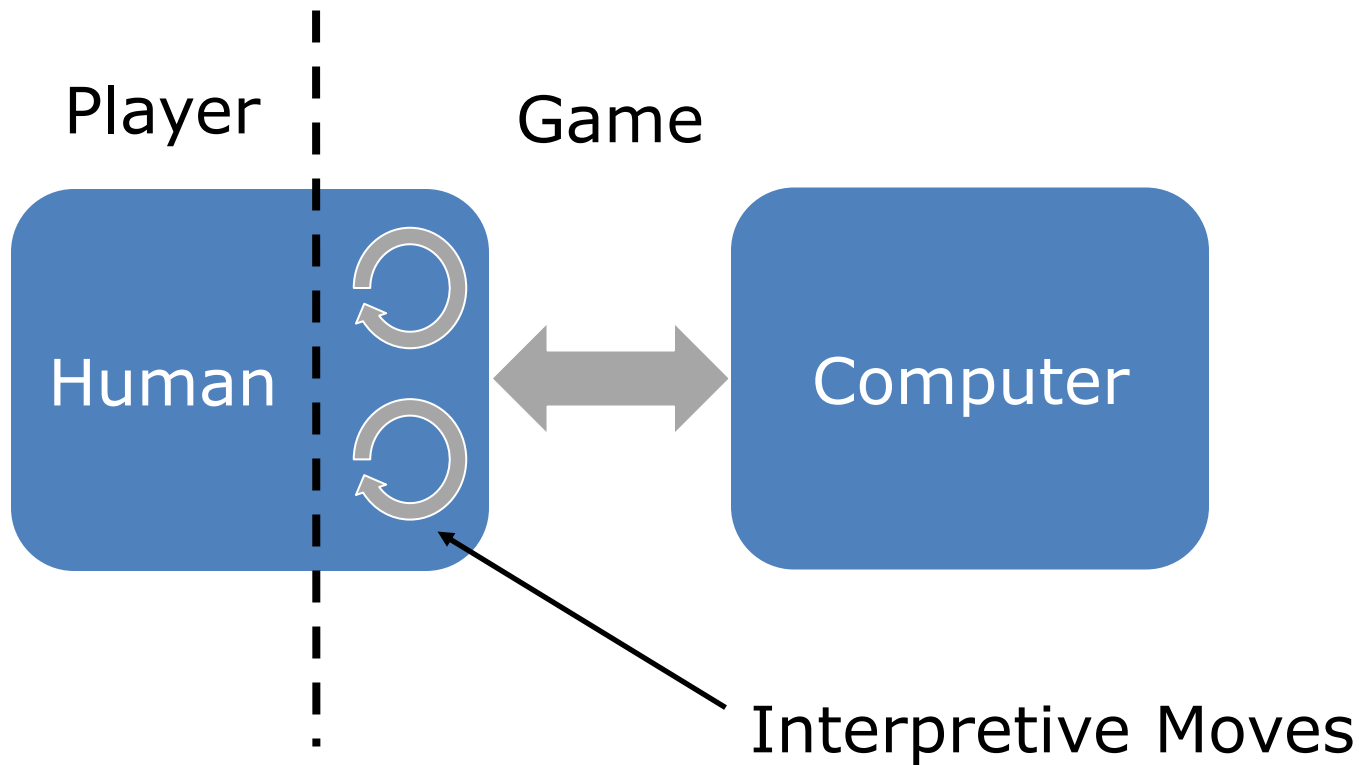


...pation.



Anticipatory play

- Turn-based games
- Puzzles
- Strategic beats
- Interpretive play



Portal



Metal Gear Solid



NONE

NONE

Rainbow Six



HUD (Heads-Up Display) information:

- Map:** A small tactical map showing the current level layout.
- Weapon:** M4 Carbine, 550x45mm GPMG, 25 rounds remaining.
- Character:** A portrait of the player's character, a man with short dark hair.
- Team Status:** A list of team members and their status:
 - Reider (Street) Reider - 100% (Alive)
 - Reider (Street) Reider - 100% (Alive)
 - Reider (Street) Reider - 100% (Alive)
 - Reider (Street) Reider - 100% (Alive)
- Gameplay Settings:** A row of icons for various settings: **ASSAULT**, **NORMAL**, **HOLD**, **MISSION**, **END**.



	 25 M4 Carbine 550x45mm (FNL) 5		Harder Street! Medium- ✓	ASSAULTING
			Sanley Street! Medi ✓	UNKNOWN
			Loiselle Street! Medi ✓	WAITING
			Prig Street! Medi ✓	UNKNOWN
	ASSAULT	NORMAL	HOLD	





Heuristics of play

- Choice
- Variety
- Consequence
- Predictability
- Uncertainty
- Satisfaction



Choice

Are there multiple
ways for this
situation to unfold?





Variety

Have we previously encountered similar situations?





Consequence

Does the choice
affect future
opportunities?





Predictability

Are we able to
anticipate
correctly?





Uncertainty

Do we feel as though
our expectations may
be overturned?





Satisfaction

Can we imagine
a satisfactory
resolution?





The Anticipatory Play Experience

- A pause in the action
- A rapid flurry of interpretive moves
- Convergence on a satisfying new understanding
- That is disrupted as the game continues



*A game is an engine for generating
interesting situations.*

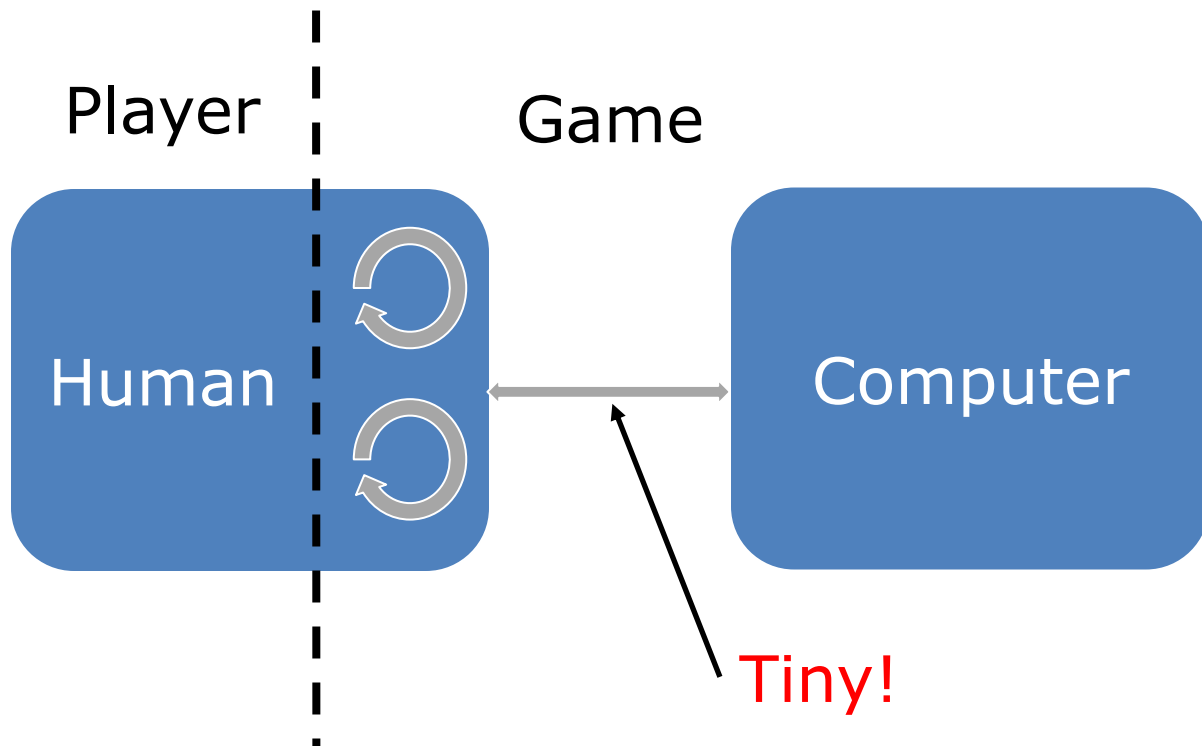


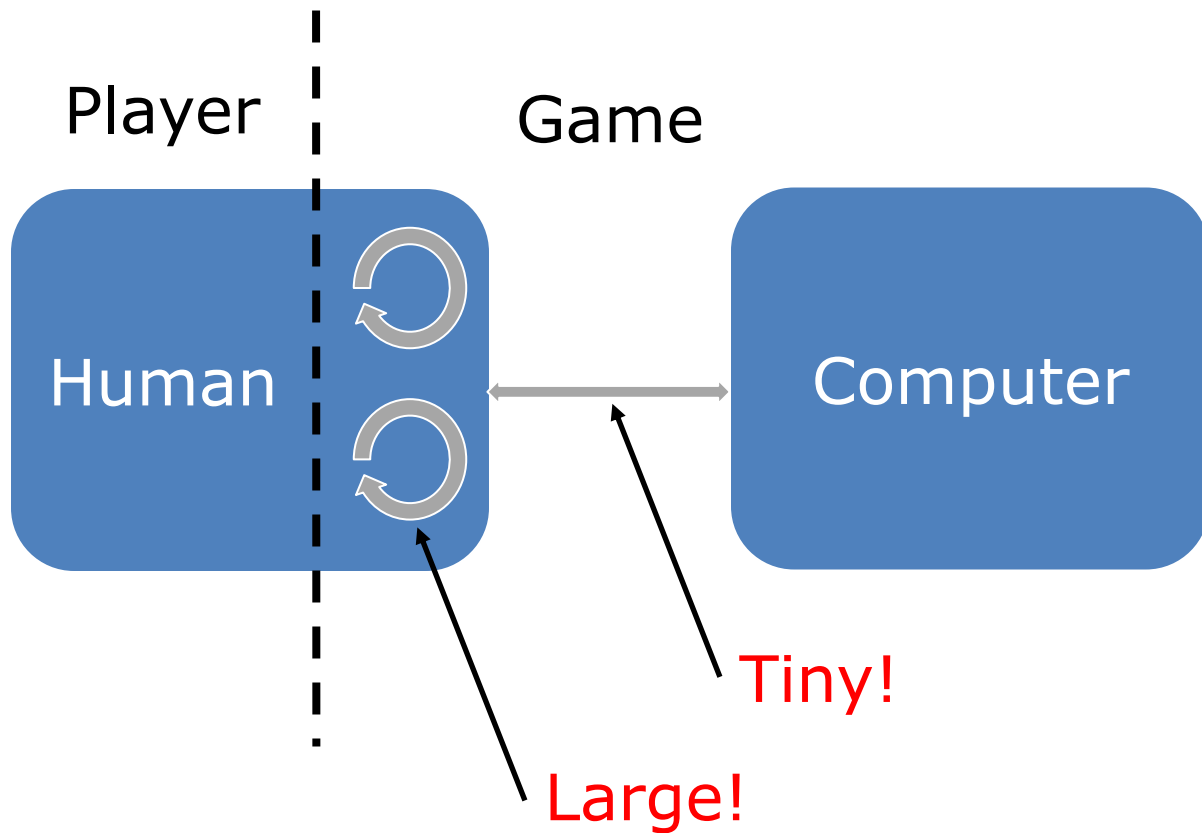
Designing for Anticipatory Play

- Interpretive moves take *time*.
- Anticipation is shaped by player knowledge.
- Interaction is the *validation* of anticipation.

SimCity







Dear Esther





Satisfaction without winning

- Coherence
- Closure





Coherence

Finding an interpretation that causes minimal disruption to our previous understanding.



Closure

Finding an interpretation that opens up (or closes off) future interpretive play



Coherence Play

“I know it looks like Batman is ditching them, but I bet he has a secret plan!”





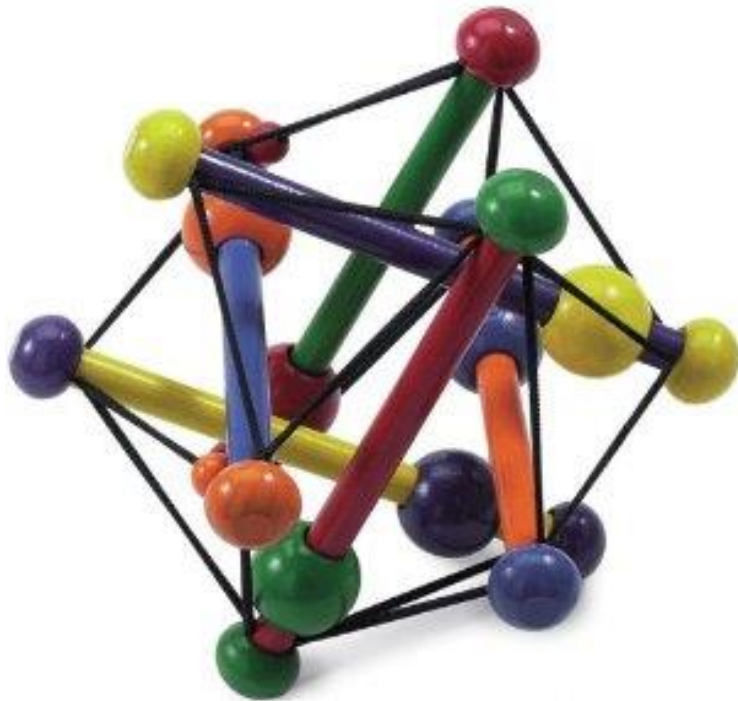
Closure Play

“But what if Batman really is a bad guy? That would change everything!”



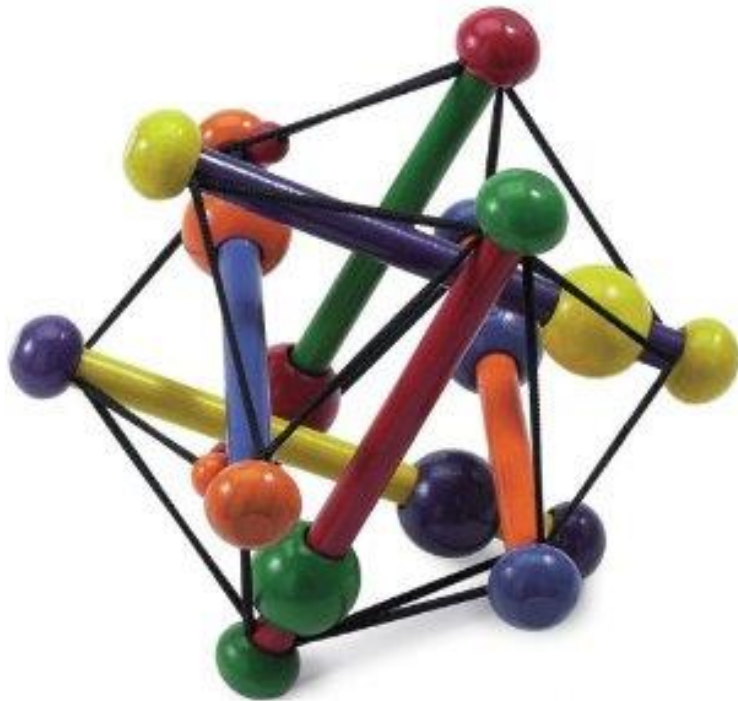


Our understanding of any situation is a network of related propositions in tension with one another.





Change something about the situation and we work to restore stability without disrupting our normative assumptions.





Winning is a arbitrary condition we impose on play spaces, in addition to our intuitive pull toward coherence and closure.



Thirty Flights of Loving

- Blendo Games
- PC
- 2012

THIRTY FLIGHTS OF LOVING

No. 1100



Super Video
Graphic Array

Copyright MMXII By Blendo Games.
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Blendo Games

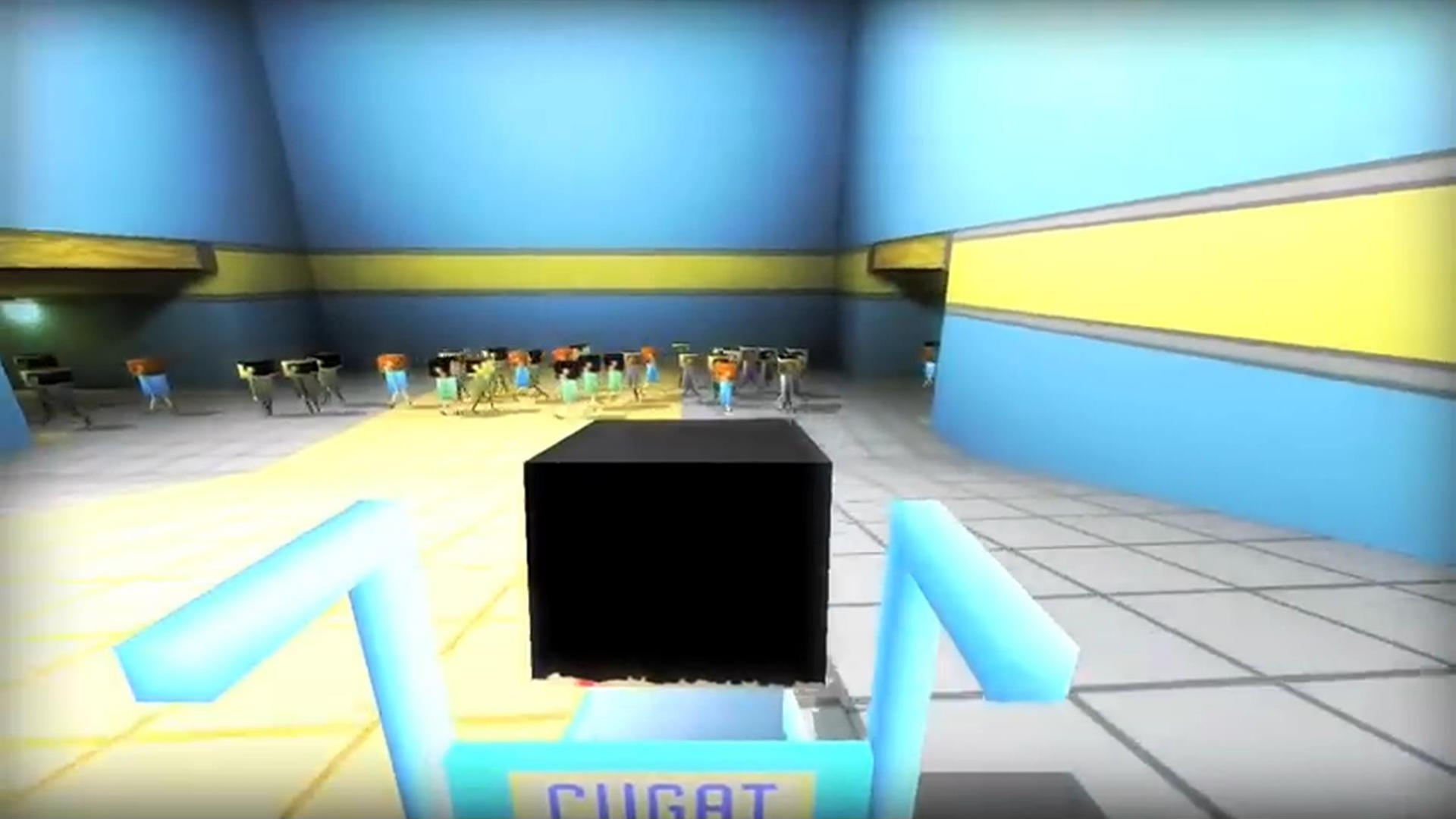
The persons and events in this programme are fictitious. Any
similarity to actual persons or events is unintentional.



Choice

- What's happening here?
- What does this all mean?

Interpretive play requires ambiguity.



CUGAT



Variety

- What new information did I just learn?
- How does that alter my previous interpretation?

Interpretive play requires that our situation keep changing.





Consequence

- What are the ramifications of this interpretation?
- Does one shift in understanding invite others?

Interpretive play requires that one interpretive move can trigger a cascade of other interpretive moves.





Predictability

- Can I make sense of what going on?
- Can I anticipate what might happen next?

Interpretive play requires that we're able to form a sense of how things are likely to unfold.

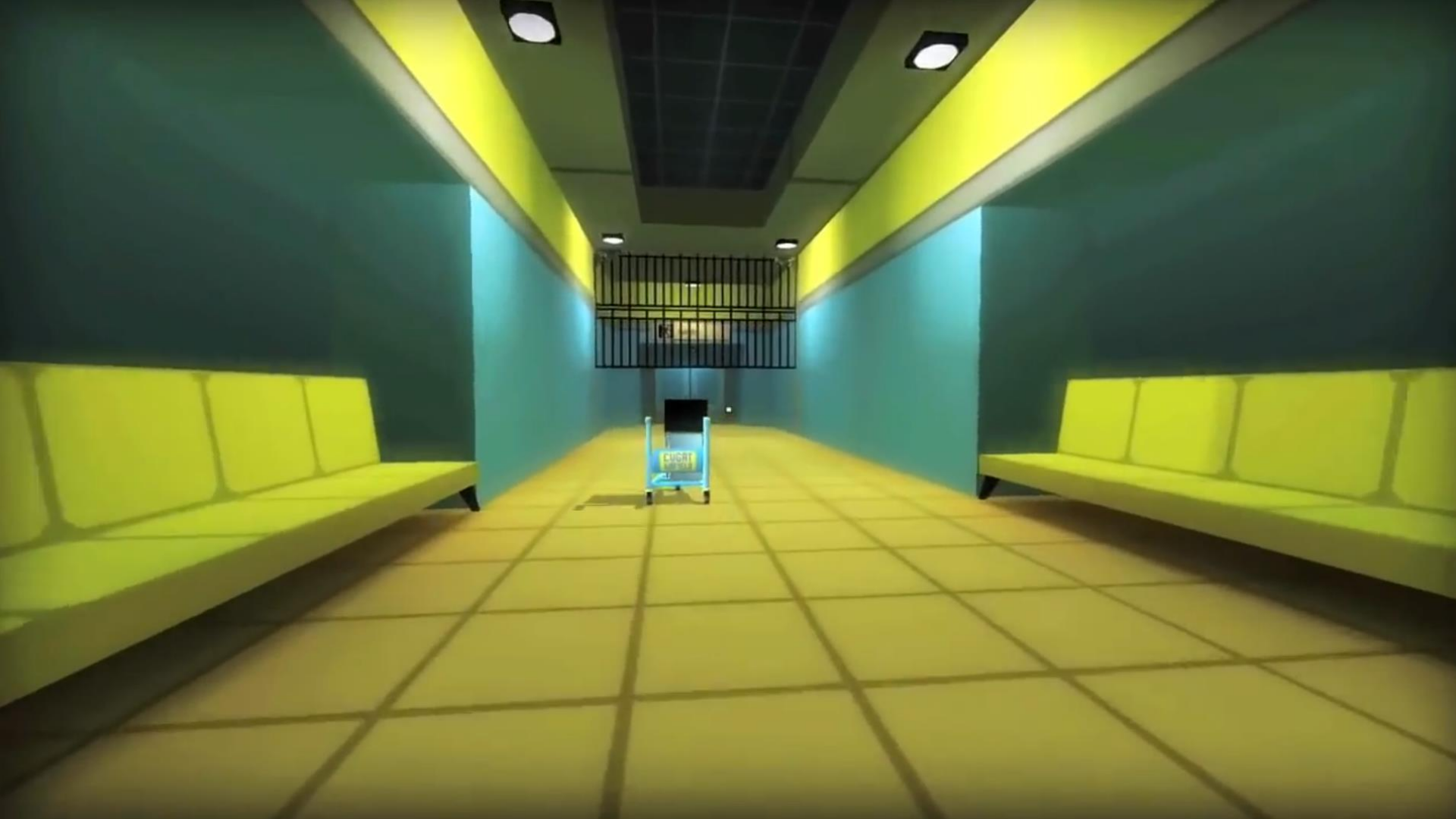




Uncertainty

- Is it possible that my predictions are incorrect?
- Is there something I've overlooked?

Interpretive play requires that we continually revisit our understanding of the situation. We're never sure we know what's coming.







Satisfaction

- Can we find an interpretation we're happy with?
- Is the experience unfolding the way we'd like?

Interpretive play requires that we be able to converge on an interpretation that we like.



P.T.

- Silent Hills playable teaser
- PlayStation 4
- Kojima Productions
- 2014



Minimalist experience

- A tiny, repetitive level
- “Look” is the only action
- Confusing feedback cues

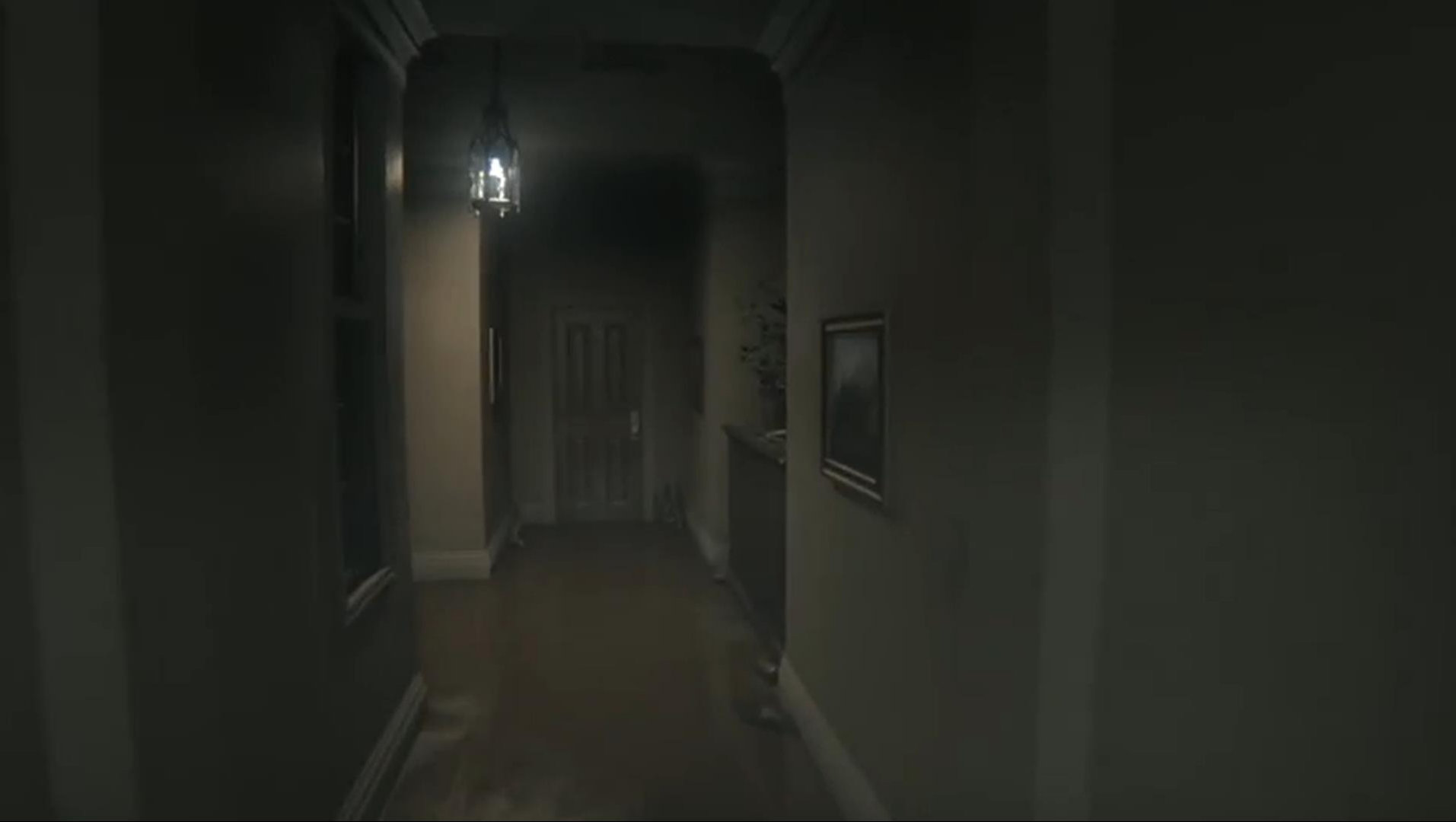


Minimalist experience

- A tiny, repetitive level
- “Look” is the only action
- Confusing feedback cues

= Hours of interpretive play!

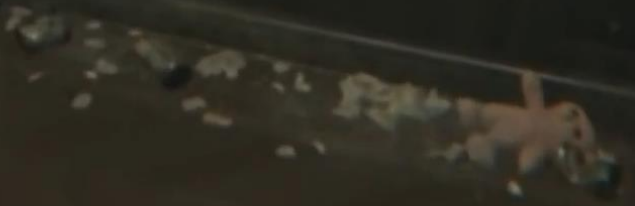






How is this accomplished?

- Environmental cues drive anticipatory play.
- Repetition concentrates attention on differences.
- Deep stillness to ponder the evidence.







i can hear them calling to me from



All “solutions” lead to feeling of dread.

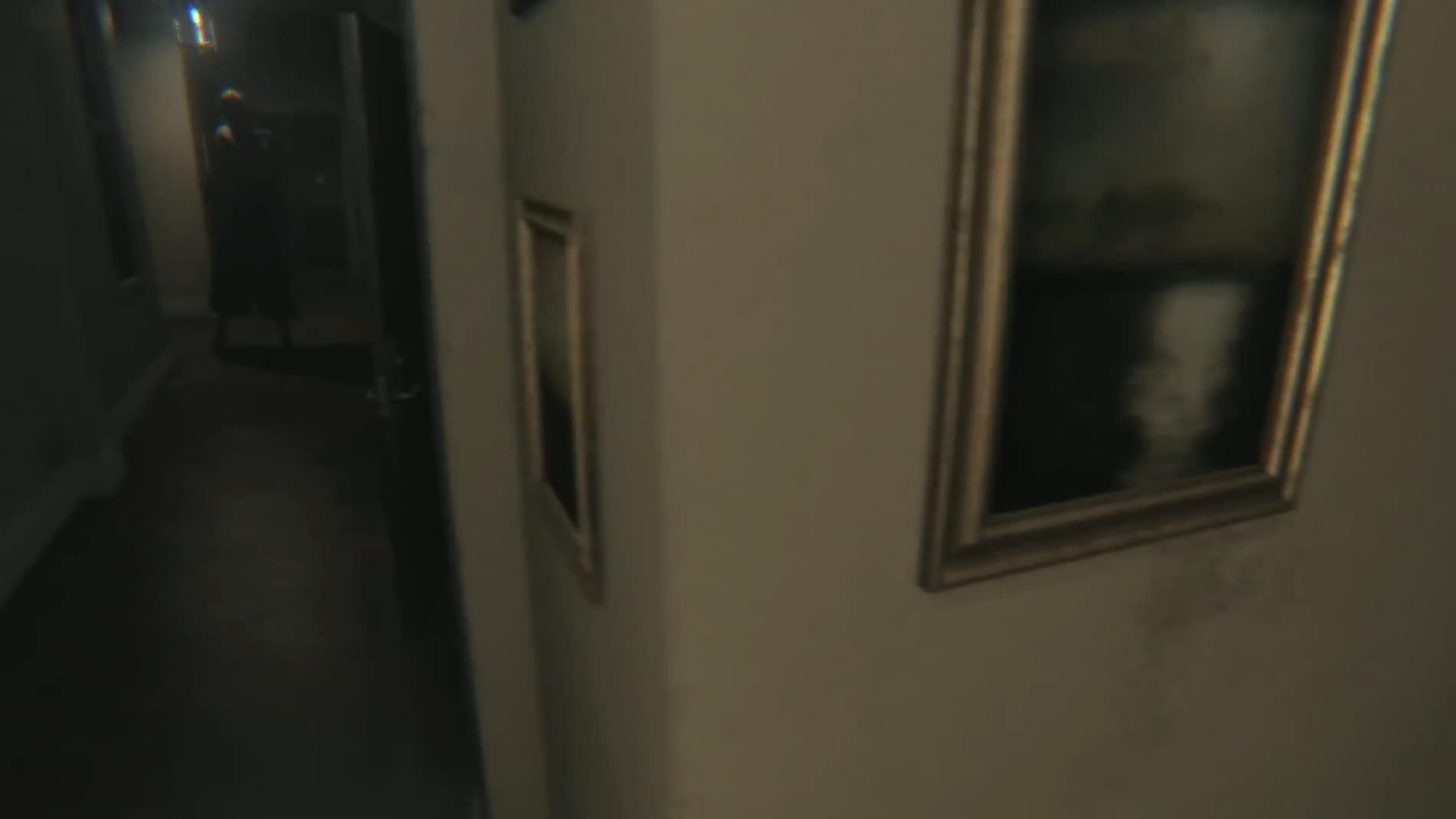
- Abuse
- Insanity
- Murder





NOPE NOPE NOPE NOPE









Journey

- thatgamecompany
- PlayStation 3
- 2012

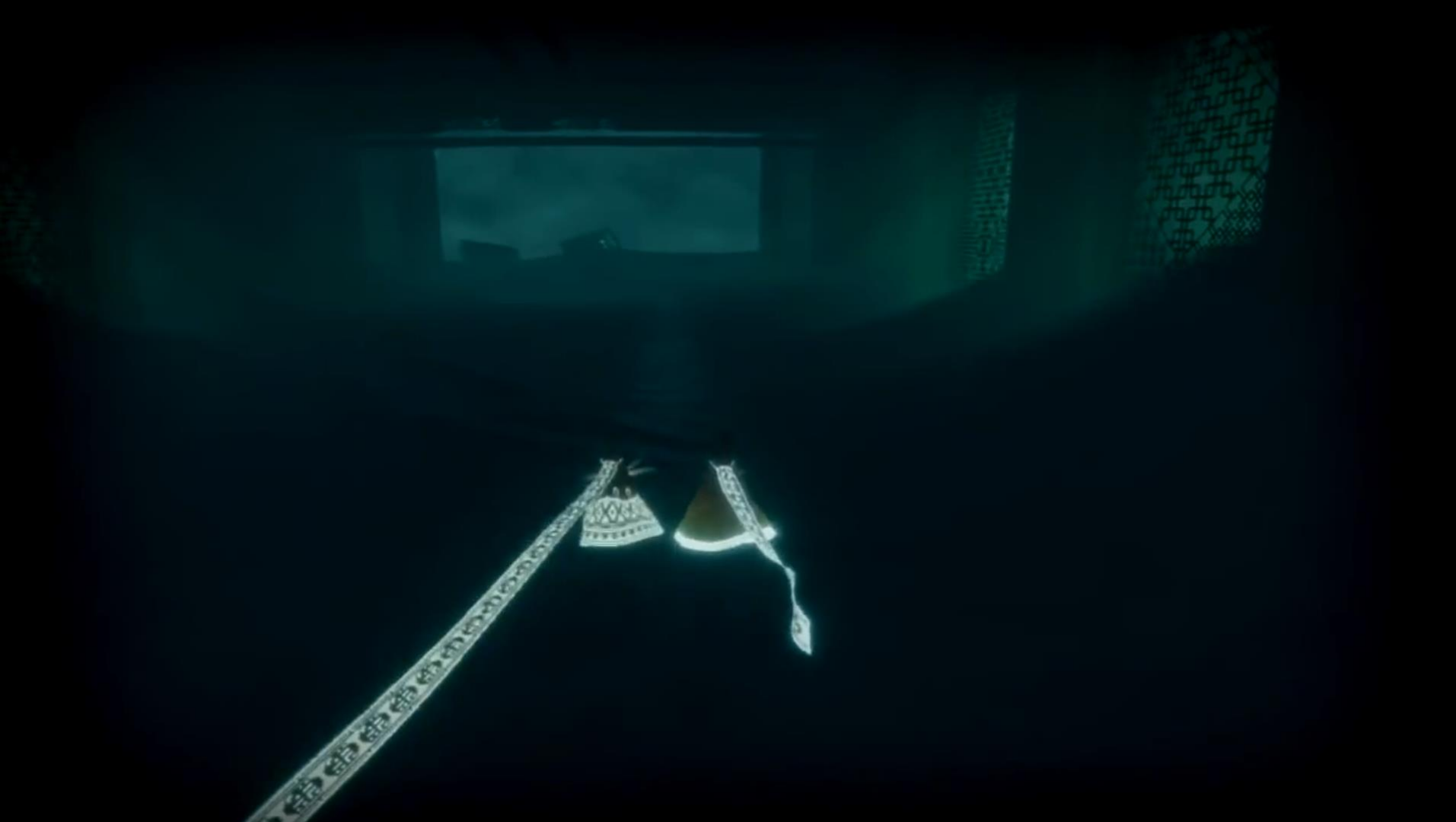




Gameplay

- Two-player platformer
- Randomly paired with another player
- Proximity recharges your jump







Player connection

- No direct communication
- Mechanics drive social behavior
- Sticking together becomes reflexive

Ico



Portal







JOURNEY





Everybody's Gone to the Rapture

- The Chinese Room
- PlayStation 4
- 2015





Meaningful play

- Meaning is the residue of interpretive play
- It's the final position of the pieces on the interpretive board



Meaningful play

- Is NOT a transfer of information.
- Is NOT a coded message.



Meaningful play

The “rules” put bounds on the sorts of meanings you might discover

But they don’t constrain the player to a single fixed interpretation



*A game is an engine for generating
interesting situations.*



*A story is an engine for generating
interesting situations.*



The Aesthetic of Play

MIT Press 2015

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