

Game with metroidvania motifs and psychological elements

Jiří Štípek

Abstract

Inner Shadows is a video game where the main character battles and gradually overcomes his phobias, which seemingly threaten the world. The game offers an experience of confronting the dark sides of the psyche and illusions. The main character gradually develops his skills, leading to the revelation of the profound impact of fear on human perception. Inner Shadows mediates the experience and reflection on one's own phobias and their impact on reality. The game creates a space for confronting phobias, enabling the gradual overcoming of fears and the acquisition of skills for their resolution.

The goal is to explore the potential of video games as a tool for processing emotional problems, especially phobias, and their influence on players. The resulting video game is created using the Unity game development engine.

*xstipe02@stud.fit.vutbr.cz, Faculty of Information Technology, Brno University of Technology

1. Introduction

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the development of a video game in which the main character confronts their own phobias and must deal with them through interaction with the game world. The main character faces a series of challenges directly derived from their fears. Each phobia is integrated into the game context, and the character must utilize their abilities and experiences gained throughout the game to cope with them. The player actively tackles obstacles and situations designed to evoke fear, anxiety, and physical reactions to specific phobias. Each phobia is represented as a miniboss that the player's character must defeat. Upon defeating the miniboss, the character receives a reward that aids them in progressing through the game and gradually overcoming their fears.

2. Context of similar games

In the realm of video games, exploring psychological themes and delving into the intricacies of the human mind has become a captivating endeavor. Titles like "Amnesia: The Dark Descent," "Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice," and "The Medium" stand out as prime examples of how games can effectively immerse players in narratives that grapple with psychological

elements. "Amnesia" plunges players into a terrifying world where the protagonist's struggle with amnesia mirrors the player's own sense of disorientation and vulnerability. Similarly, "Hellblade" offers a deeply personal journey through the protagonist's battle with psychosis, utilizing innovative audio design and visual storytelling to convey the experience of living with mental illness. "The Medium" explores themes of trauma and duality, intertwining the physical and spiritual realms to create an eerie atmosphere ripe for psychological exploration. These games demonstrate the potential of the medium to engage players in thought-provoking experiences that blur the line between entertainment and introspection.

3. Phobias

In the game, there are six different phobias, carefully selected for their potential to translate into compelling gameplay mechanics. These phobias were chosen based on their ability to lend themselves well to interactive experiences within the game world. Additionally, the game acknowledges that phobias can be addressed through various methods, including cognitive-behavioral therapy [1] and exposure therapy [2]. Through the protagonist's journey, players will have the opportunity to confront and overcome these

phobias, mirroring real-world approaches to managing fears and anxieties.

Additionally, the game features minibosses that serve as manifestations of specific phobias. These miniboss encounters provide players with a tangible representation of the protagonist's fears, creating intense and immersive confrontations within the game world. Each miniboss encounter is intricately designed to challenge players both strategically and emotionally, as they navigate through the protagonist's journey of confronting and ultimately overcoming their deepest fears. Each phobia has a fear indicator Figure 1, which signals how much fear the character is experiencing. If the indicator is fully depleted, it signifies that the character has succumbed to the phobia, resulting in failure.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, while "Inner Shadows" represents a significant step forward in the exploration of psychological themes within the gaming medium, there is still ample room for further refinement and improvement. By enhancing graphical fidelity and introducing more intricate boss mechanics, future iterations of this type of game could offer an even more compelling and impactful experience for players. Additionally, continued research into the portrayal and treatment of phobias within gaming can contribute to a better understanding and awareness of mental health issues in society.

References

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- [2] Kelly A. Knowles and David F. Tolin. Mechanisms of action in exposure therapy. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, pages 861–869, 2022.