CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Narrative started with every history of humankind, there have never been any people without narrative, everyone has his stories. Traditionally, Barthes in Mayr writing (2014: 5) viewed narratives have countless forms in the world. He also said that in that infinite variety of forms, narratives presented at all times, in all places, in all societies. Narratives are sheltered under the field of narratology. Ryan (2009: 289) describes narratology as a project that transcends discipline and media. She also said that one of the main attractions of narratives is independent of the medium in which they are presented. Abbott in Schenk writing (2013: 11-12) defines narrative as follows:

> *Narrative is the representation of a story (as event or series of events). Some scholars have argued that there cannot be a narrative without someone to tell it (a narrator), but this view would exclude most drama and film, which, though they present stories, usually do so without a narrator. Narratives consist of two main components: the story and the narrative discourse.* (2008: 237)

Abbot's argument indicates though film and drama usually present their stories without narrator, they remain narratives in certain level; they have "the story" and "narrative discourse". Narratives that have specific term *narrative arc*, are agreed to have formulation of the narrative arc sequence, that is setup – complication - development phase – resolution - denouement (Bizzocchi, 2007: 3). In this issue, narrative arc is defined as the framework for the sequence of events that make up the plot seen and the story imagined.

In detail, Bizzocchi (2007:3) claimed that sequence of events is provided with a distinct function of each stage, and the order, timing and details of each step consume a deep thought of the authors. The stages themselves may be described as effective tools to create narrative works. In the process, the setup gives illustration of characters and the storyworld. Meanwhile, the complication brings a challenge to be solved in the resolution or climax phase which is clarified through the development – the long phase that control the way in which the storytelling presents; gives an idea how the protagonist works toward his goal. Finally, denouement offers a result whether loose ends or gracefully ends.

In academic circle, a perspective of cinema studies views film and drama provide a careful design of narrative arc as a powerful device for channeling and guiding the audience's experience of story, as Bizzocchi mentioned (2007:3). Focusing on the performance, Schenk (2013: 209) said that the film reel is not the defining marker of this narrative but their use of moving images.

Similarly, because of the involvement of "the story", video games are debated as a narrative without narrator role. However, they are quite different from film or drama despite of the use of moving images; they have loose control over the design and implementation of details. Bizzocchi (2007: 3) identified it as a result in a nature of interactive process of video games. He added that a share of control is ceded to the interactor, called an agent or a player, and a critical degree of fine authorial control is lost. For that reason, he proposed an analytical framework of games, later adapted in present research. The framework involves 5

(five) narrative components, they are, storyworld, character, emotion, narrative interface and micro-narrative.

In the point of view of narratology, video games may become a medium to tell stories, or it may be better explained, though the games do not necessarily involve story, story can add to the pleasure of gameplay (Bizzocchi, 2007:1). Since the games is interactive medium, however, a traditional analysis of narrative arc cannot be used completely to analyze narrative in video game. The interactivity in video games and its probability to change the narrative (openness) made Future Narrative, a subclass of narrative, be used to analyze the narrative of video games.

Considering the arguments mentioned, this research used Future Narrative as a grand theory, to analyze the narrative formation in Mass Effect 3. Multi-linear Story, Narrative Forms and Immersion are also used to support the grand theory. In the framework of anaysis, the research applied parameters proposed by Bizzocchi (2007). Finally, to give a fruitful ideas, the theories applied are described in the following sub chapter.

2.1 Future Narrative (FN)

2.1.1 Definition

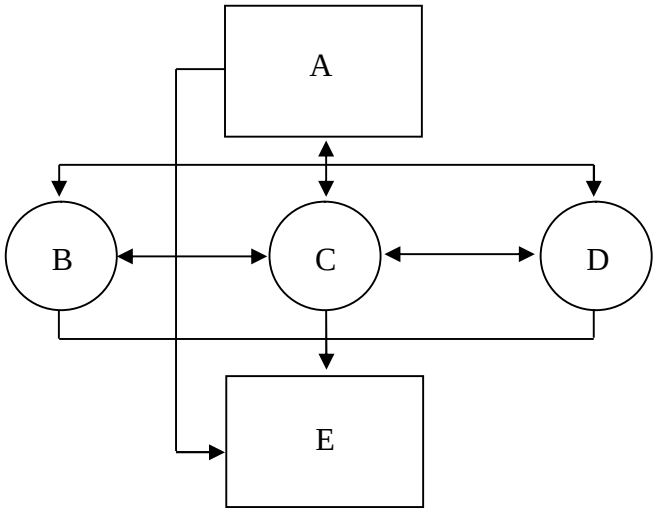
Future Narrative is a new subclass of narrative that discusses the openness of narrative in one medium. According to Bode in Domsch's writing (2013: 1), the future is a space of yet unrealized potentiality and by allowing the player to enter situations that fork into different branches and to actually experience that

‘what happens next’ may well depend upon the us, upon our decision, our values, our actions and our motivation. In this sense, future narratives preserve and contain defining features of future time – yet undecided, open and multiple. Later, those future experiences are crystallized into actuality by virtue of their capabilities to do exactly what we call preserving the future as *future*. These narratives are here called ‘Future Narratives’”(ibid). Adding to it, Domsch (2013) mentioned that Future Narratives do not operate with ‘events’ as their minimal units. Pointed to his point of view, their minimal unit is rather at least one situation that allows for more than one continuation. He called this a ‘nodal situation’, or a ‘node’, for short. The node is the defining feature of FNs. Consequently, any narrative that contains at least one node can be called a FN. As the definition says; Domsch (2013) identified and explained a situation is nodal if it allows for more than one continuation, which means that the two continuations that are both *possible* from one point have to be *different* from each other. The state after the node can only be one or the other, not both at the same time, and they are mutually exclusive. Yet, from the nodal situation, each of these mutually exclusive states is possible to be actualized. Whereas all narratives can *talk* about potentiality, openness or indeterminacy, these aspects are actually *present* in a nodal situation, they are staged by the structure of the narrative.

2.1.2 Multi-linear Story

As implied in the presentation of nodal situation, the story of a narrative is structured. Carlquist (2002: 38) clarified that there are at least three kind of story

structures in computer games: Linear story, Multi-linear story and Non-linear story. Focusing on multi-linear story, Murray (1997: 30) defined it as a written or dramatic narrative that presents a single situation or plotline in multiple versions, versions that would be mutually exclusive in our ordinary experience. Closely observerd, Mass Effect 3 has a branching story, therefore it could be said that Mass Effect 3 has multi-linear story structure. Carlquist's model visualizes the structure of multi-linear story as follow:



Here, there is a starting and an ending section. The player has to start the story in section A and ends it in section E. Along with it, it is optional what he or she does in-between, if or in what order the subquest are played. It is said if the player for example visits section C, he or she cannot visit section D. There are also at least two different submodels of this type of structure as deliberated by Calquist to describe his model:

a) One where the player always has admittance to the completely middle section. The multiliniearity in this kind of games consists in the order of

doing the offers missions or quest being free. The game offers a lot of things to do and the player can select when and if he or she will do them.

b) There is a main plot that the player has to follow. This plot involves many choices, and depending on what the player does, certain ways are opened and others are closed. This is more linear variant of the structure. The player follows one road but the game itself contains multiple roads.

These kinds of story settings are quite common in for example RPGs and in some strategy games such as *Commandos 2: Men of Courage*. This powerful narrative method serves different ideas from the traditional telling of stories; frankly speaking the method offers something new. A computer, a medium in which narratives of video games are presented, allows unique possibilities and makes interaction become fruitful. The player as an agent experiences the feeling that he or she in control of the game and that he or she can influence the story – to interface the narrative. The game designer, however, is still the author of the story. In other words, a share control is applied. The player is in charge of what can possibly appear, the players can only choose between the options that the designer have created in the game. There cannot be any other sections than those given.

This branching story made a choice situation to the player that led to multiple continuations. According to Domsch (2013: 112), FNs must at least provide one node that can lead to multiple continuations – otherwise, they are not FNs –, but they *may* also present the reader/player with a *choice* between these multiple continuations. He defined choice as what video games are all about, even though the reach of agency is not always as extensive as the player might perceive

it. He also said that a choice situation contains at least two different options. Former, the core requirement, also understood as the basic definition of nodal situation, leads player's awareness of being in a choice situation to be unimportant for its being a choice situation, though in many cases used by games or other FNs that kind of awareness is provided. Later, it is a specific player choices. In video games, choice situations are both regularly recognizable and invested with some form of *motivation* – the player will be interested in the outcome of the choice and will expect one outcome to be better than another will. One might therefore further distinguish two special types of choices, the informed (or conscious) choice and the motivated choice. A motivated choice must also be a conscious choice, but not vice versa.

Domsch (2013: 114) said that one important aspect of choice is therefore how informed it is – that is, whether we choose based on knowledge or arbitrarily. Choice situations differ in the amount of information that is given about the consequences of the different options. Here are conditions of choice situation that Domsch described:

– No information: the agent has no reasonable knowledge about anything that might result as a consequence of the options.

– Incomplete information: the agent is provided with some knowledge about possible outcomes, but no certainty in relation to the probability of the outcomes, and/or the completeness of information about outcomes.

– Complete information: the agent is provided with certain information about all consequences of all options.

Depending on the extent of information about the consequences of a given choice, the nature of that choice will differ and according to Domsch (2013: 115), the choice situations that are perceived as interesting in a structural sense provide only incomplete information. This means that there are conflicting arguments for and against each choice that might have probabilities, but no certainties attached to them. This either is experienced as a meaningful choice, where the player has to act according to probability (uncertainty) or has to hierarchise incompatibles. Some degree of information about a given choice seems to facilitate the feeling of agency, as agency is experienced as pleasurable especially when we are able to make meaningful decisions within the story/game universe. When a choice has to be made completely arbitrarily, there is only interactivity, but no (or a very low) sense of agency. In addition, the information provided is an important link between gameplay concerns and the fictional immersion by the player.

2.1.3 Modes of Operation

To analyze the narrative in video games required an unusual way due to the involvement of players, the actions that took by the player are affected by the way the game present the story through their mode of operation. According to Domsch (2013: 31), once it is established that, rather than games *being* narratives, they *contain* narratives through narrative forms, it is helpful to enumerate these forms and classify them according to their nature and mode of operation. Therefore, the following forms are considered as the foundation of the overall narrative in Mass Effect 3.

2.1.3.1 Passive Forms

All passive narrative forms are in themselves *experienced* as passive and therefore identical to the media from which they are appropriated (film, text, audio), but they can, and usually are, *contextualised* in an actively nodal way, since they are forms in an actively nodal structure. There are two passive forms used in this research: *Exposition* and *Cut scenes*. The function of *Exposition* is to introduce the player to the fictional world and its properties, to provide information about the character that the player is going to play, and to introduce the main objectives of the game, though not all of these elements need to be present. The *Cut scenes* purpose is usually to provide narrative content presenting pre-scripted events, characters in characteristic actions, dialogues, or giving background information on the storyworld.

2.1.3.2 Active Nodal Forms

First, Player freedom in video games is always a negotiation between the player's input and the game's input, and the same goes for the unfolding of a game's narrative, therefore, *player actions* is one of the active nodal forms. Second, *Quick time events* are pre-rendered video sequences that can be interacted with by the player. A passive video sequence will be shown to the player until a node is reached, which is indicated by visual prompts telling the player that she can now interact, usually by pressing a specific button. Finally, conversation situations will usually limit the player's range of options (combat options and other interactions with the gameworld are usually disabled, and spatial movement

is limited or disabled), but the player can still influence the course of the conversation. If it is not presented as part of a cut scene, it usually makes more than one dialogue option available for the player to choose from, thus creating what is commonly referred to as a *dialogue tree*.

2.1.3.3 Dynamic forms

Since video games can be described not merely as actively nodal, but also as dynamic systems, they can contain forms that are experienced by the player as narrative but that are neither passive presentations (such as cut scenes or screen text) nor dependent on the player's own input (as is the case of event triggers). In video games, in contrast to other games that cannot be classified as dynamic and that do not include real time into their rules, things can happen to or within the gameworld – and therefore affect the player character as part of the gameworld – without the player's participation.

Being mediated to the player through the visual presentation of material space, one could argue that such events should be included within the category of passive forms, but this is problematic for two reasons. First, they are presented seamlessly as part of the gameplay, they happen while the player has full control over her character while at the same time being independent of whatever the player does. And second, while some of the dynamic forms cannot be influenced by the player (like an automatic day and night cycle), others can (especially nonplayer characters), meaning that some can at least be turned into actively nodal forms. A *non-player character* (NPC) is a character in a video game that is

controlled by the gamemaster. A non-player character in a video game is usually part of the program, and not controlled by a human, but through artificial intelligence (AI). Non-player characters are one of the most important actively nodal as well as dynamic narrative forms in video games.

2.2 Immersion

Video games created for one purpose, to give people a moment for their willing suspension of disbelief. According to Murray (1997: 98; 126), *Immersion* is a part of the components that characterize the multiform story. Immersion is about "the experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place". Meanwhile, According to Ryan (2008: 54-58), there are four types of immersion, the first three of which are used in computer games. First, there is spatial immersion. Modern graphic engines are capable of presenting impressive and realistic environments that change according to the player spatial movements. Therefore, by moving around and exploring the storyworld the player feels immersed in a constantly changing world. Second, there is epistemic immersion. Epistemic immersion is the desire to know and it can be achieved by allowing the user to investigate and manipulate objects and by presenting a dialogue system that allows the user to gain additional knowledge about the storyworld. Third, there is temporal immersion, closely related to the three narrative effects of curiosity, surprise and suspense. The player is curious about how the story progresses, surprised by unexpected events and experience suspense when they know that the main character can choose between different actions that may have

very different consequences. Fourth, there is emotional immersion. With the goal of moving from simple object to the simulation of interpersonal relations between the human user and the AI-based non player character, the most important goal is to get the user to feel emotional bonding with other characters in the world and even experience empathy.