

Jessica Boyle
21001902
Informed practises
UAL BA Animation
1st February 2024

"How does the video game Oneshot break the fourth wall and what makes this technique effective?"



Artwork of Oneshot title: *Oneshot, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]*

As a child, I always found Dora's stare unsettling. She would address the audience and ask where Swiper was, then pause and wait for our response, indicating her awareness of our presence. There was a weird sensation in my gut as if she could see right through the screen (Dora the Explorer, 2000). "Breaking the fourth wall" (BTFW) is a technique that achieves this sensation of feeling watched.

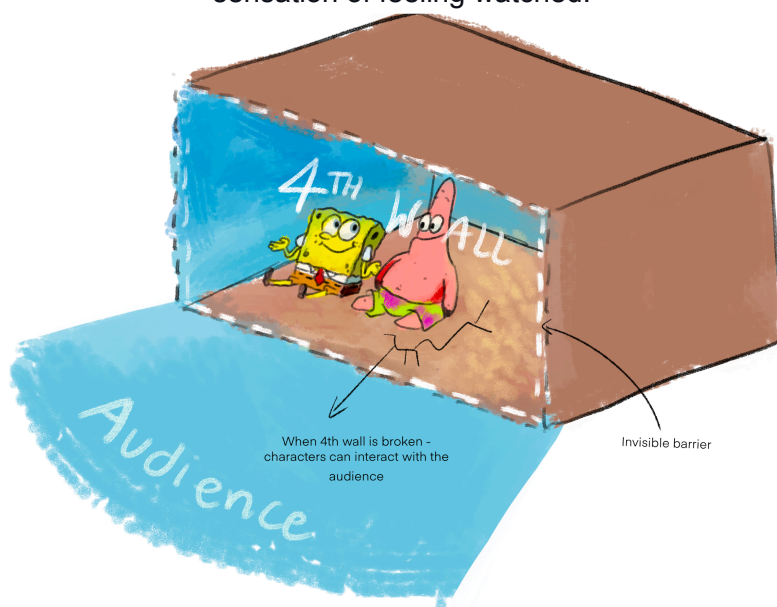
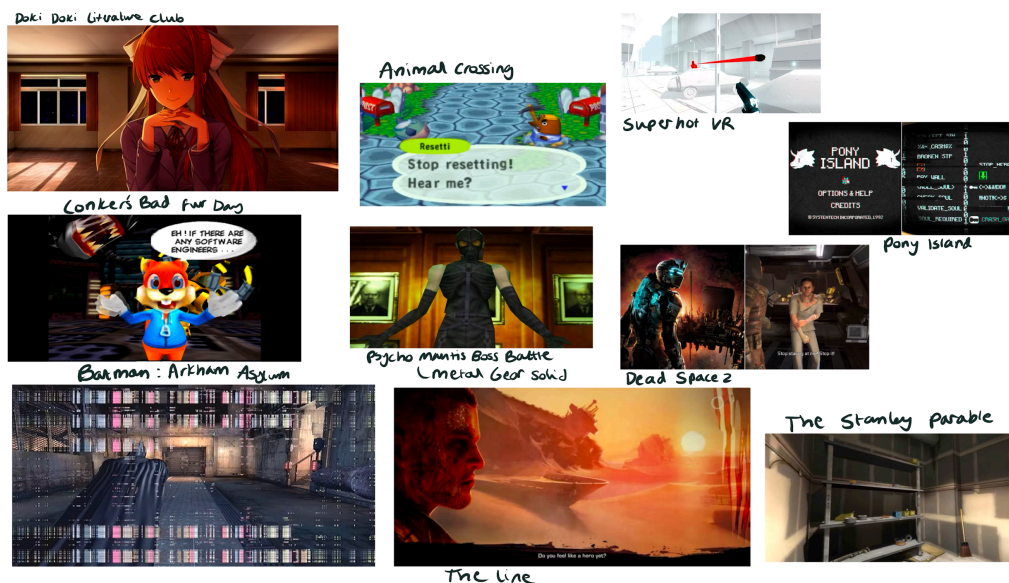


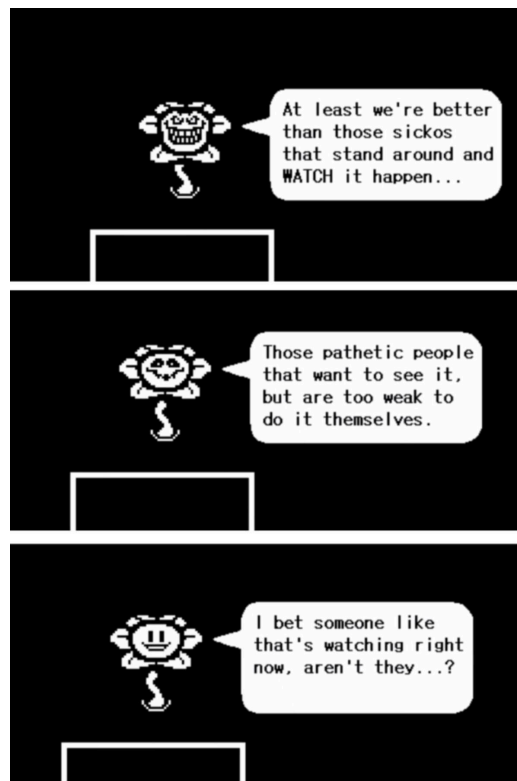
Diagram illustrating how breaking the fourth wall: Illustrated by me: Boyle J. (2024) [Digital]

Shattering the barrier between reality and illusion in the media is done for various purposes and across an array of media. For instance, it is used for narration, like in the film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). The film provides to-camera delivery, inviting the audience to join the character's experiences. Providing insights into the characters' motivations and thought processes. Dating back to Shakespeare, BTFW has been used in storytelling for centuries, such as in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare used BTFW as a multi-layered plot device that can be valuable in comedy. For example, *Deadpool* (2016) uses the BTFW technique to provide comic relief and deepen emotional connection with the audience. By directly speaking witty comments to the camera, *Deadpool* nurtures an intimate storytelling dynamic, transfiguring passive viewers into active participants.



Collage of other examples of breaking the fourth wall: created by me: Boyle J. (2024) [Collage]

BTFW can also create darker undertones, enhancing a feeling of accountability. For example, the game *Undertale* (2015) alters the game mechanics in relation to your gameplay choices, making you cautious as your actions have consequences.



Screenshots of gameplay: *Undertale*, v1.11. (2018) Nintendo switch [Game]



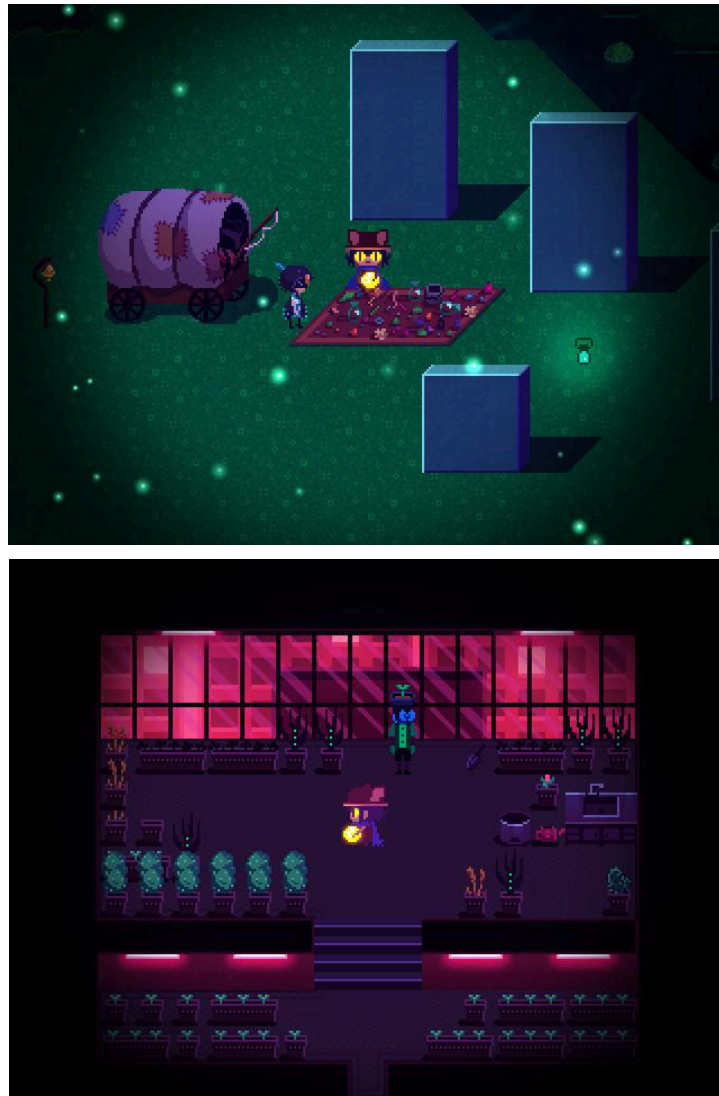
Oneshot start screen: *Oneshot, world machine edition*. (2016). Windows [Game]

Without further ado, I will now move on to what I'm discussing in this essay, a game with a similar twisted intention: **Oneshot**.

In my essay, I will explore the effectiveness of the game Oneshot in breaking the fourth wall. I will also discuss issues concerning deindividuation in crowds and the online disinhibition effect. Additionally, I will also analyse human psychology to see how some individuals tend to behave when they are anonymous in online and public settings.

Oneshot is a game you must complete in one attempt; otherwise, the world you leave behind when you close the window will change permanently.

Developed by Indie studio Future Cat, this game is a meta puzzle, apocalyptic-based game dripping with atmosphere that is holding onto its last gasp. This depressing and wonderfully dark world makes you feel like the world around you is crumbling. It's a game full of kind, realistic characters that feel real, making you feel like you must protect this world before it's too late.

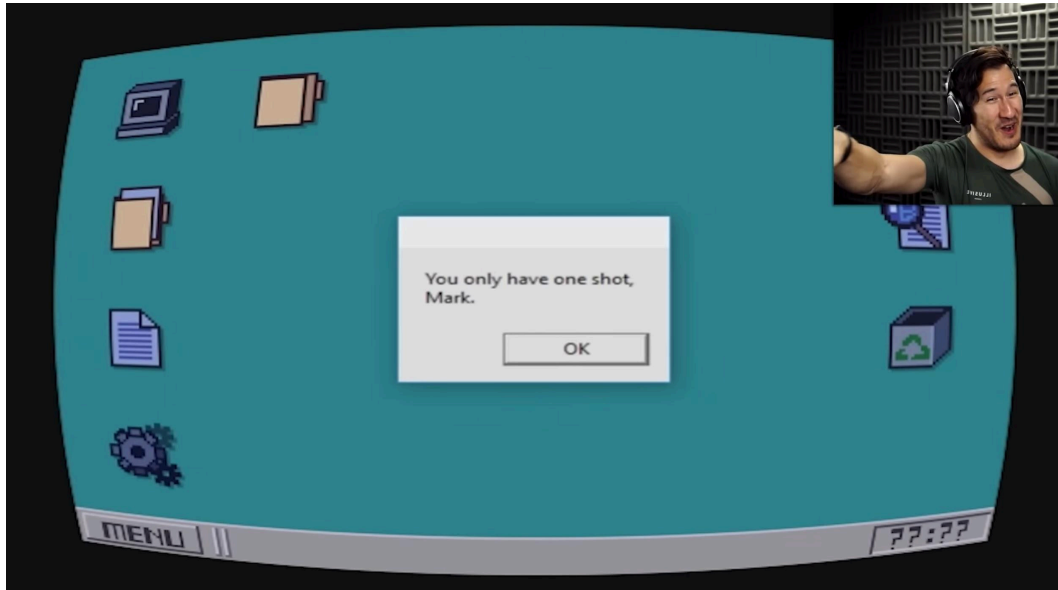


Screenshots of gameplay: *Oneshot, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]*

The game's objective is to help a child named Niko. Who has woken up in an unknown world. You must help them escape the game by returning a glowing orb symbolising the sun to the tower to reignite the world with sunlight. If you don't, the world and everything it contains will perish.

Oneshot has many examples of breaking the fourth wall. A big one is when the computer you interact with addresses you by your name, ominously saying:

"You found me. Why? You're too late. Not much of this world remains...This place was never worth saving... remember this: **Your actions here will affect Niko.**" (Oneshot, 2016).



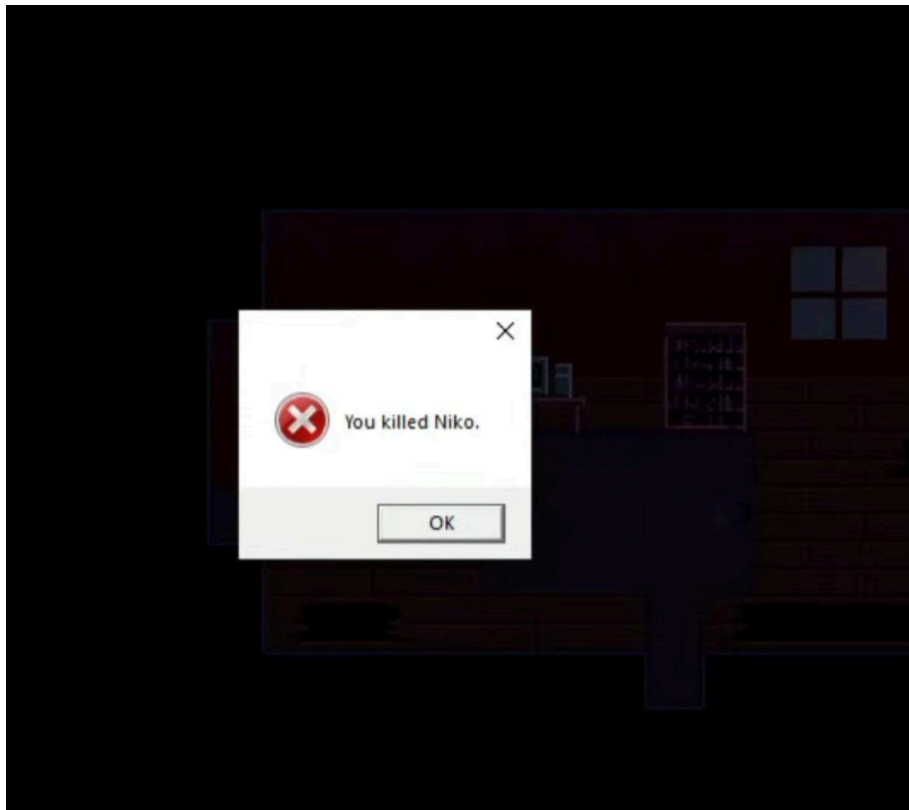
Example of the game addressing you by your name: Markiplier (2018) you have only one chance Oneshot part 1. Available at: <https://youtu.be/Z7Q9MesxBg?feature=shared> (January 2nd 2024).

You exist as a godlike being with power over Niko. However, the game ensures a separation between you and the character; you are a separate entity in the narrative, a participant to whom Niko actively asks questions and requests guidance.

Another example is making the mistake of closing the window completely. You are welcomed with the start screen looking gloomy and lifeless. And once you start up the game, Niko is nowhere to be found. Once you close the game again, a pop-up window appears and says, "You killed Niko." (Oneshot 2016). Because you left, Niko couldn't find his way and died as a result.



Screenshot of start screen after you close the game window: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]



You killed Niko screenshot of gameplay: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]

Soon after you find out that Niko is the saviour of this world, Niko also finds out they can talk to God (you). Almost immediately, Niko is very endearing to the player, conversing with the curious child as they ask about the player's world.

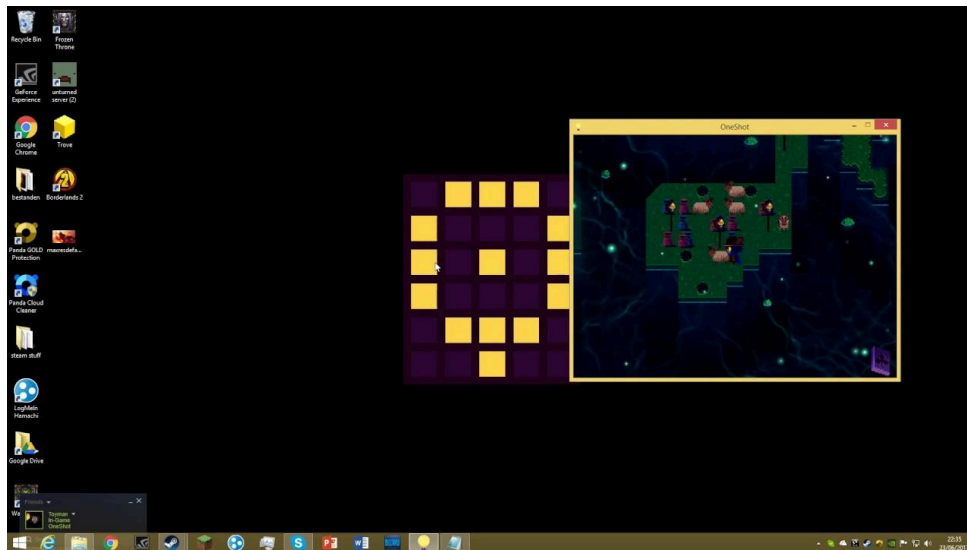
As you play, you realise that your actions have consequences and impact not only the world but the characters in it. The game makes you feel responsible for Niko; there is something raw and emotionally engaging in how the game portrays Niko as a real person.

Niko shares his love for pancakes with you and talks about his personal experiences at home. These interactions between you and Niko are heartwarming and terrifyingly real; the game cruelly does this, so we form an attachment with him.



Screenshot of gameplay Niko with pancakes: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]

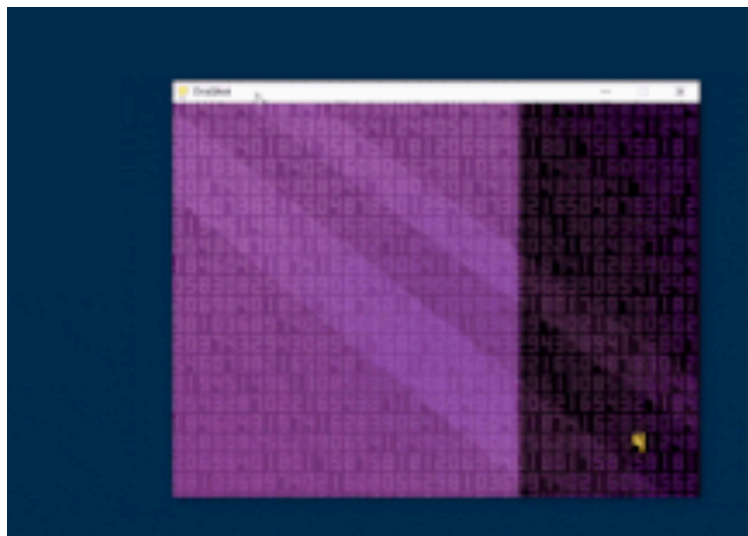
While playing this game, you may encounter some mind-boggling moments that effectively break the fourth wall in clever, provocative ways. Some go beyond the game window's limits, like peaking into files, switching your desktop background in certain areas, and shaking the box out of the screen's view and back into visibility to reveal the hidden puzzle. Yes, I know it's mind-blowing!



Screenshot of puzzle example changing background of desktop: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]

In one instance a screen of numbers is displayed to you. The computer says:

"Take this film and expose it to the void. The answer will be revealed when you bring it back again" (*Oneshot* 2016). In this puzzle, you must move the open window outside the screen's display and back again, illuminating numbers to use for a combination. As a child to a parental figure, Niko relies on you to finish the puzzles throughout the game.



Screenshot of puzzle example: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016). Windows [Game]

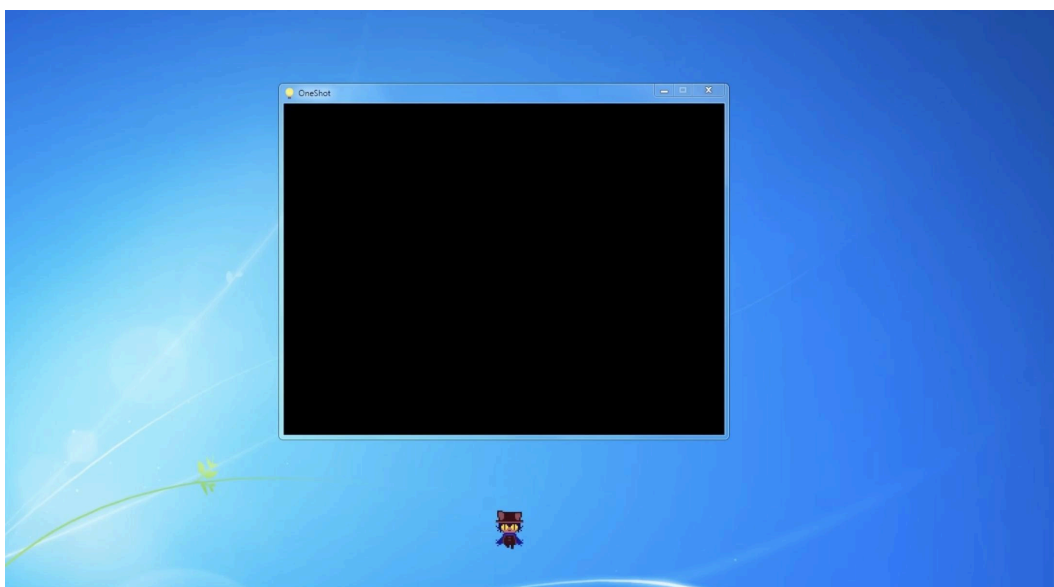
At the end of the game, you will face two choices: shatter the sun you have been protecting all game and send Niko back home, or you can illuminate the world by setting the sun into place.

Niko asks, "What's the right thing to do?" (Oneshot 2016) The player is forced to make a big decision. No matter what choice you make, you still destroy something precious.



Screenshot of gameplay. What's the right thing to do?: *Oneshot*, world machine edition. (2016).
Windows [Game]

If you choose to put the sun back in the sky, Niko will be stuck in the game, following with Niko saying the heartbreaking line, "I'll be okay" (Oneshot 2016). If you choose to break the sun, it will plunge the world into darkness and kill everyone who lives there. However, Niko will finally be free. But not before thanking you for everything, breaking through the game window barrier and being able to wander freely down your computer screen.



Screenshot of Niko breaking through the game window: *Oneshot, world machine edition.*
(2016). Windows [Game]

Should we save Niko, whom we have spent hours solving puzzles and connecting with, for our selfish and biased reasons? Or should we save the world and become a hero, trapping Niko in the game? The game ensures you feel the weight of your choice, telling you that you did this to Niko.

Oneshot is effective in BTFW because it makes you think more deeply, unlike other games, especially combat games like GTA 4 (2008), where you mindlessly press buttons and go on a killing rampage. Games usually act as an escape, creating a sense of safety through the fourth wall, allowing you to be anonymous. However, once that barrier is broken, there is a feeling of discomfort. Even though a screen separates us, we feel uncomfortable with the unfamiliar and fear what the game knows.

In a psychological sense, the bubble of comfort we feel about being anonymous online may lead us to act out more extremely than we would in person. We feel less governed by social niceties or the need to maintain appearances. This is called the Online disinhibition effect.

A case study demonstrating morbid anonymous behaviour is shown on 'Remote Control' (2011) The Experiment with Derren Brown BBC. In the episode, the audience controlled the night of Chris, who was filmed by hidden cameras and surrounded by actors. The audience wore masks and made choices by majority vote. Some choices were good like winning a new TV, some bad like false accusations of inappropriate behaviour. The unsettling thing was that the audience would always choose unfavourable scenarios every time, making the man's night a living nightmare. He faced false accusations and the more you watch, the more uneasy you feel as the night progresses, culminating in his arrest.



Title: 'Remote Control' (2011) The Experiment with Derren Brown BBC

The veil of comedy is gradually lifted, and it becomes difficult to ignore the sinister nature of the audience's decisions. This is possible because they can hide behind a mask in the crowd.

The decision-making was so sinister because of something called deindividuation. By being part of a crowd and putting on creepy masks, the audience members have stopped behaving in a socially acceptable way.



Audience wearing masks: 'Remote Control' (2011) The Experiment with Darron Brown BBC

This study supports my argument that some individuals exhibit alarming behaviour when being anonymous. The fourth wall shields us on the internet and serves as a defence mechanism. Because we can hide behind a mask on the internet, it doesn't challenge us to rethink what we say and do. But once it's shattered, we become more aware of our actions. Oneshot is effective in BTFW because it prompts us to scrutinise and evaluate our decision-making processes.

In conclusion, video games offer unique perspectives through their high degree of participation in the narrative. Breaking the fourth wall can create an immersive experience. They allow the player to feel as though they are part of the world and story. Oneshot is a successful example of a game that breaks the fourth wall to allow players to connect more deeply with characters and think about the game's consequences. The game makes you think about your social responsibility and your awareness of your actions. This technique supplies a refreshing outlook, testing the limits of gaming.

As someone who has played this game, I still think about whether my decision for Niko was right. But like the Entity said, "You have only one shot."

Bibliography:

Brown, Derren. "Remote Control & the Secret of Luck: The Experiments | DOUBLE EPISODE | Derren Brown." *Www.youtube.com*, 2023, youtu.be/9QAsZWwcAoU?feature=shared.

Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.

Brown, Tom. *Breaking the Fourth Wall Direct Address in the Cinema*. Edinburgh Univ. Pr, 2013.

Clarke, Amy. "Breaking the Fourth Wall [Definition & Examples]." *Video Collective*, 8 June 2023, www.freelancevideocollective.com/breaking-the-fourth-wall/.

Accessed 19 Jan. 2024.

ConwayBloggerJuly 22, Steven, and 2009. "A Circular Wall? Reformulating the Fourth Wall for Video Games." *Game Developer*, 22 July 2009, www.gamedeveloper.com/design/a-circular-wall-reformulating-the-fourth-wall-for-video-games#close-modal.

D Feng. "Cartoons Being Self-Aware and Breaking the 4th Wall Compilation." *Www.youtube.com*, 2018, youtu.be/kLPNab_R4il?feature=shared.

Accessed 29 Jan. 2024.

Gray, Jonathan, et al. *Satire TV : Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*. New York, Nyu Press, 2009.

Hughes, J. (1986). *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

Jessey, Ben. "7 Best Moments the Game Broke the Fourth Wall." *TheGamer*, 22 June 2022,
www.thegamer.com/best-moments-games-broke-fourth-wall/#deadpool-39-s-heal-th-bar-weapon---marvel-vs-capcom-3.

Accessed 28 Jan. 2024.

Jim, Dai. "Breaking the Fourth Wall: Directly Addressing the Topic." *Collider*, 9 Apr. 2022,
collider.com/best-breaking-the-fourth-wall-examples/.

Kapetanakis, Theo . "Breaking the Fourth Wall: A Brief History of the Narrative Technique." *TheCollector*, 13 Nov. 2023,
www.thecollector.com/breaking-the-fourth-wall/.

Lifeblood cure. "OneShot: Breaking the 4th Wall in the Best Way." *Www.youtube.com*, 2023, youtu.be/M4cngMb81jE?feature=shared. Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.

Matt. "Breaking the Fourth Wall: How to Do It & When to Do It • Filmmaking Lifestyle." *Filmmaking Lifestyle*, 2 Dec. 2021, filmlifestyle.com/breaking-the-fourth-wall/.

Miller, T. (2016) Deadpool. [Film] United States: Twentieth Century Fox.

Little Cat Feet. (2016). Oneshot [Video game]. Degica.

Packwood, Lewis. "Breaking the Fourth Wall in Video Games for Fun and Profit | Whynow Gaming." *Whynow Gaming*, 31 July 2023,
whynowgaming.com/breaking-the-fourth-wall-in-video-games-for-fun-and-profit/.

Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

Rockstar Games. (2008). Grand Theft Auto 4 [Video game]. Rockstar Games.

Sharon M. Kaye and Maria Bottis. *Performing the Digital Self: Avatar Performance and Breaking the Fourth Wall on Social Media Platforms*.

Suler, John. "The Online Disinhibition Effect." *ResearchGate*, July 2004,
www.researchgate.net/publication/8451443_The_Online_Disinhibition_Effect.

Winkie, Luke. "OneShot Is a Bizarre Adventure Game Full of Fourth-Wall-Breaking Moments." *PC Gamer*, 6 Oct. 2017,
www.pcgamer.com/oneshot-is-a-bizarre-adventure-game-full-of-fourth-wall-breaking-moments/.

Informed Practice Project Proposal (600 words)

- **Research Question and Project Rationale**

what do you plan to research? how will you research it?
& why it is important to research this subject?

For Informed Practice 3, I want to examine the research question: How do open-world games create artificial loneliness in their environments?

I will research the comfort provided by vast open-world game landscapes, mainly empty landscapes with sparse populations. Though these deserted, lonely landscapes lack liveliness, The players feel more alive as they are fully immersed in these dense land masses and are free to reflect and explore aimlessly.

Interestingly, in many open-world games, the most alive environments aren't cities drowned in lights but rather abandoned houses full of forgotten possessions and places that I have yet to encounter—the unknown.

I will research my subject by conducting secondary research, such as reading books and analysing artworks related to my topic. I will also conduct primary research by recording my thoughts in a diary while playing open-world games and recording my thoughts alone in an expansive physical environment.

It is important I research this subject as playing open-world games during lockdown has made me seek this feeling of being alive in real life. I learnt how to be okay alone in public and embrace nature, and it also really helped with my mental health.

- **At least 5 keywords**

- artificial
- aliveness
- nature
- loneliness
- self-reflection

- self-reflection

- **Situate your proposal in relation to key texts, issues and debates**

Situate issues and debates in relation to key concepts and/or subject area. Name and explain authors relevance to your project proposal

Issues I'd like to discuss in my essay are how games are sometimes surface-level. It's entertaining to an extent but fails to give you sufficient time to contemplate or reflect. Most games function similarly in pattern, giving you infinite checklists and lightning-fast gameplay. They do everything in their power to keep you from thinking about what you should be doing now in a general sense and prevent the player from thinking about the game's overall goal.

This is why open-world games stand out to me: they give you space without objectives to be lost in their mysteries and embrace solidarity. Reminding you that you can find purpose and direction without relentless stimulation of events.

Author, researcher and game designer Brenda Laurel included in her book "Computers as Theatre" (2014) that interactive experience in open-world games can help with emotional connection and creativity and promote personal growth and well-being. This is relevant to my project proposal because it highlights how open-world games can positively influence mental health.

- **Research Methodology and Analysis**

Include names of case studies, images, material examples like artworks, games or films.

I will research and analyse photography by Aristotle Goofiness. I was captivated by his massive scale work of buildings; his compositions are thousands of photos taken over months stitched together to create an immense seamless collage of emptiness. His work screams loneliness but also a feeling of comfort. He only leaves a few windows visibly illuminated; most are engulfed by the darkness. The artist communicates a familiar feeling, the feeling of being lost in something far bigger than yourself. It feels oddly intimate, a sense of solidarity that conveys empathy for each window is a person's life.

I will also discuss the video game Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018). The second map of RDR2 (2018) is just a desert. The landscapes were gorgeous. If anything, it was more so than the other side of the map, which was full of life. Unlike the other side, the barren side of the map provided no side quests, no busy cities, just a lonely second world away from all the so-called aliveness. Here's the thing, though: I felt more alive. Being alone in the emptiness made me feel more like I was living in this world. Away from civilisation, I hunted for food and made my own medicine, which created a whole new layer of realism to the game.

Other games I will mention include The Last of Us (2014). Featuring abandoned empty landscapes. Despite the diminish of human population contributing to the feeling of loneliness, the environment is dripping with life through the remnants of what people have left behind.

Bibliography:

Barba-Court, Kala. "Alone Together by Aristotle Roufanis Explores the Loneliness of Big Cities." *PLAIN Magazine*, 4 Aug. 2017, plainmagazine.com/alone-together-aristotle-roufanis-loneliness-cities/. Accessed 1 Feb. 2024.

Elieson, Clarke. "Liminal Spaces: A Theory Concerning Our Existence." *Www.youtube.com*, 2022, youtu.be/K9wPjuuXgDk?feature=shared. Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

Geller, Jacob. "Red Dead Redemption 2'S Biggest Success Is Loneliness."

Polygon, 11 Dec. 2019,

www.polygon.com/2019/12/11/20995897/red-dead-redemption-2-pc-xbox-playstation-design-loneliness.

Genas, Marcelle . "Discovering Beauty in Between: Exploring Liminal Spaces in Architecture | the Design Gesture." *Thedesigngesture.com*, 5 Sept. 2023, thedesigngesture.com/liminal-spaces-in-architecture/ Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.

Hardy, Michael. "The Stunning Loneliness of Megacities at Night." *Wired*, 2019, www.wired.com/story/lonely-cities-night-photo-gallery/ Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

"How Gaming Could Have a Positive Influence on Young People's Mental Health." *Www.psych.ox.ac.uk*, 2024, www.psych.ox.ac.uk/news/how-gaming-could-have-a-positive-influence-on-young-peoples-mental-health Accessed 18 Jan. 2024.

Laurel, Brenda. *Computers as Theatre*. Upper Saddle River, Nj, Addison-Wesley, 2014.

Lin, Rebecca. "The Potential for Video Games to Improve Mental Health Care Access | Department of English." *English.umd.edu*, University of maryland, 2021,

english.umd.edu/research-innovation/journals/interpolations/fall-2021/potential-video-games-improve-mental-health

Naughty Dog. (2014). The Last of Us [Video game]. Sony Computer Entertainment.

Pacciardi, Giulia. "Alone Together, Aristotle Roufanis Metropolitan Loneliness | Collateral." *Collateral*, 23 Jan. 2018, www.collateral.al/en/alone-together-aristotle-roufanis/. Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

Rockstar Games. (2018). Red Dead Redemption 2 [Video game]. Rockstar Games.

Solar sands. "Liminal Spaces (Exploring an Altered Reality)." *Www.youtube.com*, 2021, youtu.be/N63pQGhvK4M?feature=shared. Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

Wood, Johnny. "Online Gaming Can Be Good for Your Mental Health - Here's How." *World Economic Forum*, 15 Dec. 2021, www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/12/online-gaming-stress-therapy-mental-health/.