

# A narrative structure analysis of “Perspective” - DigiPen

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Game Link: <https://games.digipen.edu/games/perspective>

Perspective’s “story”, unlike most games, isn’t plot driven. No villains, no damsel in distress. It is a pondering on not just the physical properties that perspective yields on the world, but also on the philosophical impact of perspective. It is presented subtly, through environmental storytelling, intertwining gameplay and “narrative”.

Ludo-narrative harmony<sup>\*1</sup> is cohesive, as the game’s mechanics are representative of its narrative. However, Perspective goes a step beyond, making narrative co-dependent to the gameplay. Hence, I must first delve in its mechanics prior to its meaning.

The player controls 2 characters. The first is explicitly shown as a two dimensional blue humanoid, exclusively moving on the four cardinal directions, from a third person angle. I’ll refer to them as 2D. The second, more implicitly, is a 3D body who can navigate the third plane of existence. Implicitly, because we never see them, but control them with the goal of guiding 2D through puzzles, from a first person camera. I’ll name them 3D. Constant switching between them two is necessary to advance.

2D moves by stepping on blue platforms, dying on yellow ones. The goal is reaching the end portal of each level. 3D’s position and angle define the camera in which 2D moves through, in a way 2D’s strict movement may access the end portal. Hence, 2D is subject to 3D’s view, for example, as seen in the way that 2D’s body changes size relative to 3D’s distance from them.

The alternation of embodying two characters poses the question of “who are we, the player, in this world?”. Are we 2D? 3D? Both or neither? After my own experience, coupled with others playing this game on YouTube<sup>\*2</sup> and with my family, the overall assumption players make is that they are 3D, while 2D is a creature to be guided, comparable to the old game “Lemmings”<sup>\*3</sup>.

Players are accustomed to videogames empowering them. Our first assumption is that we are whose control is greatest, despite players technically embodying both. 2D’s dependency on 3D is visible, because their physicality is limited by 3D. However, in a conceptual level, 3D is subjected by 2D just as much, as both only progress when 2D reaches the end. The game establishes the player’s subconscious, impulsive assumption to be in control, gradually revealing that fact as the game progresses.

The hub world which connects all levels is an arcade, full of fliperamas, each which represent a new puzzle. Levels assimilate the hub, but clearly digitalized, akin to “Matrix” ’s<sup>\*4</sup> artificial reality. After an amount of completion, the hub proves itself just

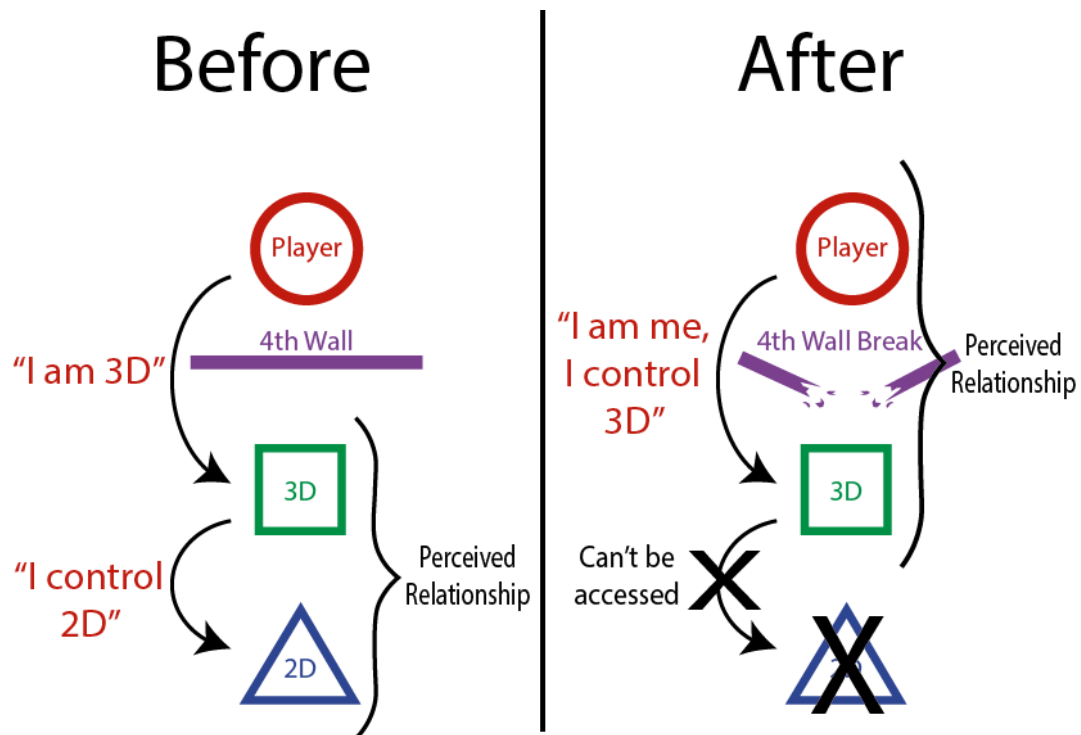
as “fake”, deconstructing before our eyes, being part of another, larger program. This is a bold hint of the game’s self-awareness. It knows this is a videogame, within a bigger, subliminal machine, which is the player’s computer/console. A game, about games within a game. This acknowledgement foreshadows the final revelation to come.

These deliberate design choices slowly inject the sensation that the player is in a similar situation to the film “Inception”<sup>\*5</sup>, being stuck in a dream within a dream – in this case a game within a game – at which point, it becomes imperceptible if you’re in the real world or not.

The most crucial revelation is in the ending. The credits roll in an endless puzzle that can’t be finished. The player assumes the game is broken, and attempts to quit. This plays into the developer’s design, leading them to a fake screenshot of their own desktop, revealed to be phoney by moving the mouse, still being inside the game, controlling 3D, while 2D is inaccessible. To truly finish, the player goes through the portal as 3D, not 2D like usual.

This ending subverts expectations not just for shock value. The player’s assumption that 2D is a subject to 3D due to physical reliance is challenged by the understanding that there aren’t only two initially perceived characters, but also a third; the player themselves. The absence of 2D relative to 3D’s perspective changes 3D’s role to being guided, while the player themselves are the guide. The exact same dynamic 2D and 3D had all throughout the game.

As explored by Star in “The Ethnography of Infrastructure”<sup>\*6</sup>, *“The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks”*. The designers of Perspective deliberately shatter the notion that players “are” 3D by reminding them that they aren’t the character, the player is themselves, playing a game, acting out a character’s role. I’ll visualise this phenomenon between prior and post the ending:



In conclusion, Perspective is a game that explores the relationship between the player and the characters they control. It challenges us to think who we are in the videogame just as much as we, as people, are to the game.

## References

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