

Rhetoric of Popular Culture

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Body Rhetorics and Kinesthetic Empathy in the Video Game

Bound (2016)

Retoryki ciała oraz empatia kinestetyczna w grze wideo

„Bound” (2016)

Abstract

Dance is found in every known human culture as part of religious, social and healing ceremonies. The increased interest in the role of dance in western psychology corresponds with the creation of the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) founded by Marian Chace, and the beginning of the dance movement therapy (DMT). The Association introduced the dance and the dance-based movement as part of the therapeutic process, in order to explore the relationship between the expression of individual emotions and movement. Drawing both from the visual rhetorics approach (Patterson and Corning 1997) and the game studies (Fernández-Vara 2009) I will analyze the multiple narrative layers in the *Bound* video game (2016), pointing to the mutual relationship the player and the game have on each other (Keogh 2018) decoding the game as a metaphor for the therapeutic effects of dance.

Taniec występuje w każdej znanej kulturze ludzkiej jako część religijnych ceremonii oraz rytuałów społecznych. Zwiększone zainteresowanie rolą tańca w zachodniej psychologii koresponduje z założeniem przez Mariana Chace'a American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) i popularyzowaniem terapii tańcem (DMT). Stowarzyszenie ADTA wprowadziło taniec i ruch oparty na tańcu jako nieodłączną część procesu terapeutycznego. Czerpiąc zarówno z retoryki wizualnej (Patterson, Corning 1997), jak i teorii groznawczych (Fernández-Vara 2009) przeanalizuję różne warstwy narracji w grze wideo „Bound” (2016), ze szczególnym naciskiem na wzajemne relacje między graczami i grą (Keogh 2018) oraz na postrzeganie gry jako metafory procesu terapeutycznego.

Key words

embodiment, body rhetorics, kinesthetic empathy, dance movement therapy, *Bound*
ucieleśnienie, retoryki ciała, empatia kinestetyczna, choreoterapia, „Bound”

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Body Rhetorics and Kinesthetic Empathy in the Video Game *Bound* (2016)

1. Introduction

Paraphrasing the title of the book by Judith Butler (2011) one can state simply that the bodies do matter. While the Cartesian mind-body split has positioned the body as submissive to the mind, in the last century the body has gradually been reinstated as just as important (Patterson, Corning 1997, 14). What seems peculiar about the body is its duality. On the one hand, it is the source of discomfort, pain, ageing, and shame associated with taboo pleasure, and on the other it is associated with the tools of expression and exploration. One's agency and embodied practices become increasingly important elements in the wide range of areas, from dance and performance studies to the broadly understood medical practices, including psychotherapy, psychiatry and the alternative medicine, where dancing has been acknowledged for its effects in, among others, treatment of anxiety, depression, sexual abuse trauma, addictions, eating disorders, and the Parkinson's disease (Mills, Daniluk 2002, 77).

Even prior to that, rhetorical scholars had long recognized what happens when the body starts to be used as an instrument of argumentation, rebellion, and self-identification (Butterworth 2014, 260). Furthermore, Patterson and Corning note that the body has been present (indirectly) in the rhetoric since its Greek origins. Recently the Anglo-Saxon and French feminists have turned their conscious reflection towards the body as a political and gendered text (1997, 5). Whether considered through Foucault's notion of power, which places the body at the core of the discourse (1972, 58), or through its affective presence and the effect on the audiences (Hauser 2000, 150), the body becomes a crucial element in developing the rhetorics of transformative and persuasive performance (Pezzullo 2010, 349).

Although the performative feature of the body has been widely recognized since Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, McNaughton makes an interesting argument that the "identity is not merely performed but also argued" and that "if one's identity is to be accepted one needs to mount a convincing claim to that identity, a claim that will be accepted by one's intended audience" (McNaughton 2007, 142). Moreover,

Kenneth Burke understands rhetoric as an embodied theory, locating the meaning-making, as the primary function of the language, in the body (in Chávez 2018, 243). Furthermore, this claim emphasizes the rebellious and self-actualizing potential of the body, but also underlines the importance of the presence of the Other in front of whom the body can be actualized and defended. This will be shown in the final part of the article as a crucial point for understanding the effects of dance in mental health therapies. This might explain the human fascination with all forms of activities that require movement and challenging the body, from dance to sports, which requires a study of hybrid types of movement-based performance arts.

Historically, the embodied performance and the dance have always been present in the human communities as part of spiritual, cultural, and healing practices. They played an important role in the culture and human communities, and were used in healing practices connected with birth, death, sickness, fertility, as well as mental health (Ritter, Low 1996, 249). The dance is a crucial element of performative arts and performance studies, which emphasize its avant-garde character, and fondness for “the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized” (Schechner 2002, 4). There, the body is both the tool of expression but also a tool of analysis, the presence of which can be at the same time oppressive and restrictive, at the same time it can resemble abuse and be used in the process of healing.

That very notion stood as the inspiration for the Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), which is based on the belief in the connection between the mind and the body. According to its theory, the conscious and unconscious physical movement can affect both the emotional and psychological processes of the patients, as the overall aim of Dance Movement Therapy is to provide safe, creative environment for the patients who are encouraged to experiment with different forms of movement. Linking nonverbal communication with embodied expression, DMT often includes the group’s influence, the use of metaphor, the verbal dialogue and, crucially, the group’s or the therapist’s feedback. Furthermore, depending on the approach and the needs and prior experiences of the participants, DMT can include thematic movement improvisations, dance routines and elements, relaxation exercises, vocalization and incorporation of music (Mills, Daniluk 2002, 78).

Although the results of the Dance Movement Therapy have not been fully researched as of yet (as is the case with most other art-based therapies), the existing literature documents the positive influence it has on various groups of patients, both in clinical psychiatry on patients with such diagnosed disorders as schizophrenia and depression, and in psychotherapy on children, the elderly (Ritter, Low 1996, 250) and female survivors of sexual abuse (Mills, Daniluk 2002, 78).

The relationship between the therapeutic influence of the dance and movement on patients, especially the survivors of trauma and the survivors of abuse in childhood, can be explored in the 2016 PlayStation 4 video game *Bound*. The connection between video game play and embodied performance has already been studied by applying the theatrical framework to video games, the player's role can be understood as a performance, but it also explains the spectatorship of video games and the effect these practices can have on gameplay (Fernández-Vara 2009, 1). However, while most often attention was devoted to music, rhythm and dance video games, such as the *Dance Dance Revolution* (Behrenshausen 2007), *Bound* does not belong to this genre. I will analyze it through its multiple narrative layers and the relationship between the player and the avatars, arguing for a particularly interesting portrayal of the complex influence of the player on the game and the game on the player as well (Keogh 2018).

2. Embodied memory and the body rhetorics in *Bound*

Bound (2016) is a short, artistic single-player platform art game which, first of all, includes an aesthetically stunning, albeit confusing, chaotic, and deeply symbolic world. Through its impossible Escher-esque architecture, vivid colors and abstract forms it soon reveals that underneath the complex visual metaphors it offers a simple, yet difficult narrative about straightforward but dark emotions. These binary oppositions are mirroring each other on different stages of the game between the realistic, slow-paced layer where the pregnant woman takes a slow walk down the beach on her way from her car to the house of her estranged father, and the surrealistic world depicting the world of her imagination. The story is told visually rather than through explicit dialogue, but at the same time it leaves little to doubt. The player controls the woman, but is offered little or no agency; after every few steps the woman takes a break to reflect on her sketchbook filled with pen drawings depicting humanoid characters in a geometricized world (Figure 1). The player is allowed to speculate whether the characters have been created in her childhood as her alter ego, in order to help her cope with the extremely difficult, abusive, and violent divorce of her parents. Each page represents a separate level of the game and the player is free to choose their order by flipping the pages: the concentration on one of them transfers them to that other world designed as a complete opposite of the other.



Figure 1: The protagonist's notebook depicting the characters and referring to the aesthetics of the level or its topic. The characters here differ from their portrayal in the game, allowing for speculation about the time of their creation in protagonist's childhood.

In one of them there is a beach depicted with the use of warm, pastel colors, with the calming soft sounds. That imaginary world is clamant, garish, created of sharp, pixel-like, geometrical blocks. Here, the player controls the Princess, a slim, childlike humanoid with a purple winged helmet, who embodies juvenile innocence and joy. Whereas the pregnant woman's moves are restricted and painfully slow in the way that conveys the tiredness of the last trimester, the Princess's world is filled with unconstrained movement and speed: her body is not limiting her, but rather is a tool of expression and a source of pleasure. *Bound* is not distinguished from other platformers in terms of the challenges posed in the gameplay, as the rather simple gameplay serves rather as a background for the narrative and the aesthetic expression than as a challenge.

What makes *Bound* particularly interesting is the Princess who moves exclusively through dance. She walks, runs, and jumps just like most video characters, but at the same time she incorporates dance into her every motion. When she steps on a thin footbridge, the way she stretches her arms to regain the balance and takes careful, graceful steps betray the dancer's training and skill. Maria Udod, a dancer who has been motion-captured as a reference for the Princess, mixes ballet with the contemporary dance styles (Ore 2016). Thus, the Princess can be seen performing complex aerial aerobics figures as well as the more classical figures: she can be seen performing arabesques and stretching when left unattended and simple actions performed as part of the routine. Although it is impossible to assess her age, something in the child-like body type and the frivolity and joy of her movements allows to speculate about her young age, drawing a parallel with the protagonist's age at the time of her parents' divorce as she is seen in the still pictures at the end of each level. At the same time, her dance indicates a trained professional, which

by itself can serve as a metaphor of the substantial work that one has to endure in order to polish one's skill enough for it to seem natural and effortless. Just as there are years of training and discipline behind the dancer's graceful moves, it is likely that there are years of therapy or personal self-reflection behind the pregnant woman's calmness and happiness; obviously, if one makes an assumption that associates motherhood with fulfillment and satisfaction (McQuillian et al. 2008).

Bound, being a highly metaphorical narrative, is clear about its message. While at no moment does the character address the identity of the man whose house she wants to visit (and it is up to the player to decide whether the game will end with the two of them meeting or if she would leave without introducing herself to him), it is implied that he is her estranged father. The story of the trauma that has marked her childhood is told in two different ways: through the story of the Princess and the scattered 3D scenes in between the levels. The player sees only singular scenes, frozen in time like a photo, which reveal themselves upon approaching them with a camera (Figure 2). At first presented as scattered shards, as if depicting the moment directly after the explosion, the image starts to emerge showing domestic pictures of parents engaged in an argument and the children hiding away. The images are silent and still, and their form contrasts with the aggressive and disruptive memories they include. The pregnant woman once has been the scared girl seen in the memories and one can assume that the sketchbook and the characters in it were her coping strategies that helped her to survive an incredibly difficult period of her childhood. Thus, the Princess is not the only one who has her life counterparts. Furthermore, when analyzed through the eyes of the child escaping into her imagination, it soon becomes clear that despite its colorfulness it is not a safe universe.



Figure 2: The half-formed still image portraying childhood memory. On the left there is the protagonist and her brother, on the left — their father. The images reveal the scenes from life, including parents fighting while scared children hide, and their father leaving, upon approaching.

The mother – a Queen – is portrayed as cold, capricious, egoistic, and distant, with occasional moments of kindness. She orders the Princess to save the collapsing world and defeat the monster which is threatening its stability. The King is portrayed as a complex figure rather than unambiguously positive or evil - he is both the violent beast and the misunderstood, sulking ruler. Between them the Princess does not matter; she is just a pawn and yet she is clearly more a part of this world than either of them. It is interesting how the player learns about the relationships within this family and how the figure of the mother is painted as equally ambiguous as the father. Although presumably on the same side as the Princess, the mother is not portrayed as warm, caring, nor even protective. While at times the Queen may sound aggressive towards the girl (“Are you going to stand there all day? Move!”), which might suggest some sort of verbal and psychological abuse, she is mostly distant and cold. She expects the Princess to fix their common problems without aiding her like a parent should. Furthermore, the girl’s appearance bears many childish traces, which one could expect from a child, but which are absent from the Princess’ character. This allows the players to speculate about the absence of the parent figure in the main character’s life and the fact that she might have been forced to grow up quickly in order to take over the role of a parent for both her brother and her mother.

The King is not the only one actively trying to hurt the Princess as each level ends with the swarm of black shapes, which in the game are referred to as memories, and which attack her, revealing in a surprising twist for the platformer video game genre that the Princess does not possess any weapons, and is virtually incapable of attacking the enemies. In the most powerful and telling mechanism of the game, it turns out that what she can do is dance. Swirling around, she becomes invincible (Figure 3).



Figure 3: When dancing, the Princess is surrounded by ribbon-like colorful energies, deeming her invincible from the King’s attacks and painful memories.

The discourses of power and influence have always been a crucial part of constructing the body, and, therefore, of the body rhetorics (Foucault, Butler). Bodies, especially those that are not cisgender, male, white, able, and heterosexual, are impossible to analyze outside of these discourses. They cannot be treated as unpolitical, as they immediately take part in what Jana Sawicki calls a “practice of power”, where the body is still taboo or marginalised, and the “[a]ttention to the body reminds us that if rhetoric ignores method, it ignores the way some people consciously put their bodies where others put only their theories” (in Patterson, Corning 1997, 9).

To use Heideggerian terminology, the body is “present-at-hand”, which is revealed when it draws attention to itself in distress, illness, and pain, so, in other words, when it does not fulfill the expectations, when it “does not work”. Like other tools, its being “ready-to-hand” means that it is primarily understood through its functionality (Martin 2012, 2). In the performance of dance, however, the body becomes noticed and brought to the foreground before it is broken, sick, or hurt (Alarcón Dávila 2012, 107). The use of the body as a metaphor and, consequently, as a rhetorical argument, already betrays its peculiar position in the world, both as a subject and the object. Husserl refers to the same dichotomy as the difference between body as *res extensa* and the organ or perception and action, as both the constituted (*Körper*) and as the constituting (*Leib*). Hence, it is not possible to experience the world without a body (Alarcón Dávila 2012, 110). As a result, the mind vs. body separation becomes less and less tenable in medical and psychotherapeutic practices. Similarly, the embodied character of memory has been widely acknowledged (Eberhard-Kaechele 2012, 268).

In the next section I analyze the many layers on which the body rhetorics are employed in *Bound*. I discuss how the dance is employed in Dance Movement Therapy and then analyze the relationship between the performance and the video game experience. Although the game has also a Virtual Reality (VR) version, which could be interesting from the point of analysis of player’s embodiment, in this article only the primary non-VR version of the game is analyzed. A special emphasis is placed on the story mode rather than the game plus offering speed-run possibilities after playing through the story mode for the first time. While all three versions of the game might offer different experiences, my analysis concentrates on how the three levels (the human protagonist, the Princess, the player) incorporate the therapeutic metaphor.

3. Kinesthetic empathy in *Bound*

The active nature of the video game engagement means that the relationship between the player and the game characters becomes complicated and multilayered.

While in other media it is easier to draw the line separating diegesis from the extradiegetic, in video games the concept of the “fourth wall” becomes more complicated (Conway 2010), as the player is never limited to just one side, operating on both sides. First and foremost, the player explores the world through the avatar they control, but on the other hand they also sometimes play the more passive role, when watching the story unfolding in front of them – either through the cut-scenes or other forms of pre-scripted narrative. Thus, the player’s position is a peculiar one: at the same time they are an active performer – as they are the ones controlling the action, movement of the characters and the outcome of the game – but also as the passive audience. The video game player, therefore, becomes both the actor and the spectator, which, as some argue, can allow to draw parallels with the immersion in the theatre, where immersion is encouraged not only in the audience members but also in the actors (Frasca 2007, 169). That connection between the video games and both theatre and, more generally, performance, has often been indicated (Fernandez-Vara 2009, 1), although it would seem that the spectator(ship) aspect of the experience has been analyzed in less detail than the active participation.

The dual role of a player is connected to the dual role of a game avatar. There are two dominant ways in which the game avatar can be interpreted: as means by which the objective can be achieved or an object of perception. In the former case, the avatar can be interpreted as a prop, an extension of the player’s body, which allows them to enter the fictional world and enhance the experience of player’s embodiment. In the latter case, the player’s gaze turns away from oneself to their avatar or character, separating again these two roles. The avatar is observed most carefully by the player when its “game-playing skills are least in demand”, so during cut-scenes (the animated scenes which player watches but does not participate in) or in the moments that require less skill or concentration on the gameplay (i.e. the challenges are really easy). These are the moments when one can describe the player as a passive spectator.

In *Bound* this difference becomes very distinctive when considering the dance itself as the dance plays several functions. The control the player has over the Princess does not reach to her dance, but solely to the direction in which she moves and the moment of her jump, which makes the player responsible for her falls. Interestingly, the player does not control the way in which she dances nor the moment in which she performs what seems like more complex figures: the dance remains immanent of the player who becomes firmly placed in the position of the spectator, admiring the skill and grace of her movements, and yet feeling stripped of the chance to identify her movement with their own agency. The only time the player can actually influence the dance itself – rather than the dancer – is when

the Princess is attacked by the memories at the end of the level. Then, the game recommends to “press R2 to dance”: the player still cannot influence *how* she dances, but rather *that* she does.

This transfer between agency and lack thereof can be analyzed through Bertolt Brecht’s understanding of the non-Aristotelian theatre. In his writing he was against the immersion in the theatre, emphasizing the importance of the critique on the side of the audience, which is possible only when the immersion is broken (Frasca 2007, 169-170). In the video game context that effect can be achieved exactly through that dissonance between being in control and being pushed into the spectator role from which one experiences the dance. Several theorists (Keogh 2018) stress the embodied nature of every video game play, listing not only the kinesthetic involvement in the case of dance or sport games with the kinetic sensors controllers, but putting equal attention to the use of all senses during the play. The way in which holding the controller requires the physical engagement with the game, for example, already allows to examine the way in which the game involves the player’s body and muscles, ensuring they are never passive. Here, the empathy, understood in its simplified version as the ability to understand other people, is seen as one of the main mechanisms behind the audiences’ enjoyment of the performances. Furthermore, especially in the context of the dance, the kinesthetic empathy can be used to transfer this ability to the sphere of movement where it refers to the embodied empathy and the process of reflecting the performer’s emotions in one’s own, static body (Parviainen 2003, 152).

Such an effect is often explained through the “mirror neuron system”, which is a group of specialized neurons found in the primate nervous system that ‘mirrors’ the actions and behaviors of others. Research shows that mirror-neuron activity mediates imitation and is responsible for the understanding of action. In practice it means that the same part of brain is responsible for executing and observing an action (Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004, 170). The system is responsible for experiencing sadness when watching someone else cry, but it also is used to explain the pleasure experienced while watching dancers perform. What’s important, the effect of mirroring is strongest for the actions that are familiar to the observer. This means that a current or former dancer will react more strongly while watching a dance performance than someone who never practiced dance, and that they will be more sensitive to the movements and body language of a non-dancer (Parviainen 2003, 158).

4. The therapeutic effect of *Bound*

The Dance Movement Therapy approach overlaps with the findings of performance studies, which is a field that examines the body and the performer’s

presence in the context of the spectacle, be it a classical one set on the theatrical stage or elsewhere. While the clearly defined performance space – the stage – is important, the central object of the study is an observed body of the performer and, indirectly, the experience of the spectator as the one making sense of the spectacle. Researchers stress the self-reflective nature of any performance (Burrill 2010, 222) and the fact it is always done for someone, that it is being watched (Fernández-Vara 2009, 7).

In their meta-analysis Meredith Ritter and Kathryn Graff Low list five categories of positive influence of the Dance Movement Therapy on its patients: “resocialization and integration within a larger group system; nonverbal creative expression for emotional expression; total self- and body-awareness and enhanced self-esteem; muscular coordination, broader movement capabilities and tension release; and enjoyment through relaxation” (Ritter, Graff Low 1996, 249). In another study, Mills and Daniluk interviewed female survivors of child abuse and noticed six themes emerging from their accounts: reconnection to their bodies, permission to play, sense of spontaneity, sense of struggle, sense of intimate connection and sense of freedom. The similarities can be divided into three main areas, which are: reconnection to one’s body/physical relaxation, sense of pleasure/enjoyment and emotional expression. The dance movement is said to relax tense muscles, which enhances the feelings of comfort and self-appreciation, which in turn are especially important in trauma survivors and people that suffer from deteriorating physical health. Playfulness associated with dancing and music is especially important when opposed with the more rigid and formal setting of the traditional therapy and can free the patients from the stigmatization of both the therapeutic process and the mental disorders or distress. Finally, dance and movement allows a conscious reflection on the difficult emotions and traumatic memories which often resist verbalization.

This largely explains the presence of the dance in the Princess’ movements. The few clues the player has about the pregnant woman allow to speculate about the impact of her parents’ divorce. The subdued, pastel colors, the restricted movements, and the alienation and loneliness of the character during her stroll on the beach contribute to the feeling of sadness and tiredness. It is easy to see her as a sensitive child who took refuge in art and imagination, and who had to struggle with the aftermath of her parents’ quarrels. Now, as an adult, she wants to confront her father, prompted by her own pregnancy, a motivation influenced perhaps by her parents’ absences. The character she envisioned as a child bears resemblance to a child herself, embodying, however, the positive mindset and the childlike freedom of expression, and joy, which all are aspects brought up in Dance Movement Therapy. Through imagining herself as the alter-ego, which has already helped her

work through her trauma, she both reconnects to the child within her and the one that has not been born yet. The freedom and ease of movement contrast with the physical limits of the pregnancy at the time when the exercise is more important and more difficult (Lokey et al. 1991).

The Princess also symbolizes the needs of the adult woman, becoming her avatar through which the woman reconnects to her body and experiences, spontaneity, freedom and the “permission to play”. That last aspect strikes as particularly important in the reading of the woman through the lens of potential depression, either current or past. Her movements translate as burdened with a certain heaviness which does not match the stereotypical images of pregnancy as the blessed, positive, and a happy state. Although it is possible to speculate that he is the driver of the car in which the woman arrived, the father of the child is never mentioned or showed directly, and it is not obvious whether the woman does not repeat her mother’s personal story of a single parenthood. The reluctance with which she sets on the way to confront her father contrasts with the bright colors of the scenery, and the bright blue dress which she wears, surely symbolizing innocence. However, the difficulty of the movement caused by the advanced pregnancy does not allow to read the woman as happy, nor her trauma and grief as placed solely in the past. The dance in Dance Movement Therapy is used to reconnect the patients with their inner child and to teach them again how to allow themselves to play.

The woman is both the spectator who watches the dance in her imagination, and the performer, as the Princess is herself. *Bound*, then, involves a double spectator. First, the Princess is the only one affected by the dance directly: the dance frees her from attacks and emotional discomfort, making her visibly more confident. Then, the pregnant woman is her first spectator, as she mirrors the Princess’ emotional progress with the one of her own. Every time the later overcomes her obstacles, the former finds a strength on her own, to stand up and go further towards her destination. The player, to a degree, controls both women, but also observes both of them. The player watches the Princess’ dance, but also sees it mediated through the pregnant woman, seeing how she becomes stronger through it. One more layer of mediation can be observed as the Princess’ digital body mediates the movement performed by Maria Udod, the artist whose performance has been captured to serve as the reference for the in-game model. As Lori Landay argues, the use of motion capture – or performance capture – “calls for a new kind of performance, acting, and filming. (...) The actors must perform as in an imagined mirror, one that will be realized digitally” (2012, 133). Thus, the Princess embodies the actual, specific human dancer underneath the digital skin. The player mirrors the dancer’s movements, creating a dialogue between a specific performer and a specific player.

One more factor of the Dance Movement Therapy that has been linked to its positive effects relates to the interaction between one's own movement and emotions, as well as the mediated emotions of the group and, more generally, both the participant's presence and the presence of the Other. The effects of the group in therapy, even the traditional, non-kinesthetic one, has been well documented: it facilitates the expression of emotions, it encourages the participants to join the exercise. Additionally, the mediated experience of the emotions of others allows not only to witness ones that might be diametrically different from one's own, but also to introduce previously unknown techniques of working through them (Schmais 1985, 19). Thus, learning happens here through observation and, potentially, imitation, which becomes especially useful, important, and simply easy if dance is understood as entertainment. What is more, in *Bound* the role of the player's Other is taken by both player characters: when the player's attention is directed towards one of them, they can be aware of the other character, witnessing their actions. The pregnant woman's role is that of an observer for most of the gameplay, as her only truly agentive action marks its last scene, but the Princess, being part of her, always observes her in a turn too, as they share the strength evoked by the dance.

5. Conclusion

Bound is neither a dance nor a music game, as the bodily movement is an important part of the diegesis rather than a structural element or a game mechanic. A lack of agency over the immediate movements seems counter-intuitive, creating dissonance in the player between the constraints of the play, and the perception of the dance performance as essentially embodied. Drawing from the literary studies (Baetens and Poucel 2009, 612), a constraint indicates a self-chosen rule or set of rules different from those imposed by language or convention, that is used systematically throughout a text, both by the author and by the reader. For example, constrained writing seems to provide more freedom than a writing which would abandon most rules, as it requires more self-consciousness on the part of the reader, and, therefore, greater awareness, enhanced creativity, and engagement.

In the case of *Bound* the surprising limitation over the movement, which, usually, is the very aspect the player can control in the world meticulously designed by its creators, can be interpreted as such a constraint, allowing one a more in-depth look at the performance. Thus, the player-as-agent is forced into the player-as-observer role, challenging the binary division of the performer and the spectator. Furthermore, the multiple uses of the body in the games – the player's body, the pregnant body of the main character, the juvenile, dancing body of the Princess, the body of the performer whose movements have been motion captured for

the game – allow the player to experiment with the identities in, arguably, even more complex ways than in many other video games. The hybrid, cyborg nature of the player-game relationship is often mentioned as the perfect context for the identity play, and in this discourse *Bound* is an interesting example, because it draws the arguments back from the mind to the body, playing on the assumptions associated with the use of the body and the interest it sparks as a part of performance. Through kinesthetic empathy kinesthetic embodiment is invoked, allowing one to discuss the videogames as not only embodied but also meaningful because of it. For Kirkpatrick, however, dance is always a part of a player-game relationship, as video game is a “dance *with* machine” (in Keogh 2018, 122). Thus, even if in *Bound* the player does not control the way and the form of the presented dance, they still produce it as an effect of the player-machine hybrid.

The body is a tool, but also allows to construct an embodied argument, to express oneself. The powerful message of this game highlights the beneficial influence of the dance on dealing with traumatic events, but by engaging the player on several different levels it allows them too to become part of the audience and, in some cases, a part of the therapeutic group. It can be argued that the cathartic influence of dance as presented in this deeply emotional therapeutic game could be beneficial to players who have experienced similar outcomes themselves. This conclusion offers a new direction for further research both in the performance/game studies as well as from the psychological point of view. Better understanding of the nature of kinesthetic empathy, as well as the type of immersion it causes in video games, could allow for the creation of games that consciously incorporate the Dance Movement Therapy.

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