

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Arjoranta, Jonne

Title: Playing the Nonhuman : Alien Experiences in Aliens vs. Predator

Year: 2020

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © Taylor & Francis, 2020

Rights: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Rights url: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Please cite the original version:

Arjoranta, J. (2020). Playing the Nonhuman : Alien Experiences in Aliens vs. Predator. In S. Karkulehto, A.-K. Koistinen, & E. Varis (Eds.), *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture* (pp. 108-124). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429243042-8>

5 Playing the Nonhuman

Alien Experiences in *Aliens vs. Predator*

Jonne Arjoranta

What is it like to play a nonhuman? In a classic philosophical article, Thomas Nagel (1974) argues that we are fundamentally unable to imagine what it is like to be a bat. Because our senses and cognition are structured in a certain way, imagining what it would be like to be other is difficult, if not impossible (cf. Barsalou 2008). Yet, in media genres from fantasy to science-fiction, we are routinely shown what it is like to be something else or asked to imagine it. Different media do this with different tools, from descriptions in text to moving images on the screen. Some of the portrayals of aliens may be similar, but different media also have different tools at their disposal.

This chapter examines how videogames portray the nonhuman, what kind of assumptions they make about being nonhuman, and what kind of tools they use to convey the experience of nonhumanness. I focus on *Aliens vs. Predator* (Rebellion Developments 2010), because it has three different but intertwined campaigns, where you play as a human, an alien, and a predator. Therefore, it depicts two nonhuman experiences that can be compared to the human experience. This analysis is complemented with examples from other games that represent playing nonhuman characters. The discussion here draws from the theory – or a loose family of theories – of embodied cognition to better explain the nonhuman experiences discussed.

(Non)Human Cognition

The idea that cognition is a neutral, withdrawn observer with an objective view of the world is an idea created largely during the Enlightenment. The rational, withdrawn cognition is the classic view of reason propagated by the philosopher René Descartes, who established his ideas on the foundation of a mind-body dualism. This view considers the mind to be separate from the body, and identifies personality, cognition, and identity with the mind. Bodies are seen as little more than containers for the minds within. This creates philosophical problems, like explaining the relation of the immaterial mind to the material body – a problem famously solved by Descartes by suggesting that the pineal gland acts as

a conduit between the two. The relation between the mind and the body was seen as two-way, with the rational mind sometimes compromised by the passions of the body.

In comparison, embodied, situated (Anderson 2003), or grounded cognition (Barsalou 2008) relies on the notion that action, context, and the body are central to cognition.¹ In opposition to Descartes, this tradition of thinking is more in line with philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002), who emphasize how humans are not simply minds put into the containers of bodies, but how being in the world – bodies and all – is necessary for being human. The idea of embodied cognition is complex and multifaceted, but these six typical ideas associated with it offer a brief overview (Wilson 2002):

- 1 Cognition is situated.
- 2 Cognition is time pressured.
- 3 We off-load cognitive work onto the environment.
- 4 The environment is part of the cognitive system.
- 5 Cognition is for action.
- 6 Off-line cognition is body based.

What these six things mean for the present discussion is that *bodies matter for thinking*. The difference between a human body and different alien bodies is therefore meaningful when discussing cognition and experience in videogames. However, it should be noted that not all of these ideas are equally rooted in research. For example, Wilson (2002) shows that the fourth idea (the environment is part of the cognitive system) does not have strong evidence in research (for a general critical overview of claims often associated with embodied cognition, see Adams 2010).

Videogames are largely based on the false assumption that human bodies are uniform. It is an assumption shared by the game examples discussed here: the human perspective detailed later in this chapter is that of a capable soldier. The analysis conducted here examines this normative assumption of what humans are like. While it would be outside the scope of this chapter to deconstruct the ableist assumptions presented, it is shown that even the normative bodies represented here can be weak and lacking.

Nonhuman Perspectives in Games

Games, both digital and analogue, use multiple media to convey ideas and experiences of human and nonhuman alike. I've played characters ranging from cyborgs to aliens, vampires and elves, all embedded in physical, social, and experiential surroundings that reflect what it is like to be them (Lankoski 2011) or what their perspective on the world is (Allison 2015).

Games can give us the possibility of experiencing things we normally cannot experience, and which would be hard to portray in other media. For example, Gualeni (2015) details how the game *Hærfest* (Technically Finished 2009) can provide at least a glimpse of bat phenomenology.² One of the most common ways of representing nonhumanity in games is to include characters that have senses different from humans. A few of the typical ways of doing this are using synesthetic design, visual indicators, and color filters.

Although there are exceptions, many – if not most – games aim for a naturalistic portrayal of human experience.³ This means that things like visual representation aim to convey a relatively “normal” look to the player. Often, this includes some stylistic flair, and genre conventions shape how things are portrayed, but the overall effect is more or less recognizable as human experience. Changing the visual representation is one of the easiest ways of portraying alien experiences – perhaps because vision is such a central sense to most able-bodied humans. Games deviate from the standard representation of human visual experience in a few ways. Using different color filters is one of the typical ways games portray alternative ways of perceiving the world. The way humans usually perceive the world falls within a small range of variation, even when accounting for the stylistic filters and alterations videogames use. Large differences from the naturalistic norm are easy to notice and generally change the feel of the visual experience significantly.

Games could use other methods than the visual to portray nonhuman experiences, for example, by using sounds. When playing nonhuman characters, it is common to have them grunt, hiss, gurgle, or otherwise make sounds not typical to humans. For example, the playable zombies in *Left 4 Dead 2* (2009) make a variety of unpleasant sounds. However, these noises sound identical whether one plays a zombie or a human, so the experience of hearing seems identical for the zombies.

Before moving on to analyze *Aliens vs. Predator* in more detail, I will introduce the concept of *synesthetic design*. I use *synesthesia* to refer to game design where one sense is expressed through another sense. One of the typical forms of synesthetic design used in games is portraying hearing through sight. For example, in *Mark of the Ninja* (Klei Entertainment 2012), the interface provides several types of clues on what the player should be focusing on. Yellow circles represent areas of interest, while blue circles serve as warnings of how far sound can be heard. This is constantly telegraphed to the player, as any loud sound will be accompanied by a blue circle. Because *Mark of the Ninja* is a stealth game where keeping quiet is important, the player has to be aware of the noise they are making. However, actual sounds in the game are not accurate enough to convey information to the player, so the location of sounds needs to be conveyed through another sense. By looking at the blue circles, the player can accurately gauge how far noise travels (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 A hiding ninja in *Mark of the Ninja* (Klei Entertainment 2012). The dim circle marks the range of sound produced by the dog.

Similar techniques are used to communicate information in cases where the player character is not human. For understanding nonhuman experience, it is useful to look at how bats are portrayed in games. Bats are interesting examples because they are prototypically different in the sense Nagel (1974) discussed, but still evolutionally close to humans. Bats have also been represented in videogames. Thus, there are some common techniques for portraying what it is like to be a bat.

For example, in *Hærfest*, one can see the environment only by activating a pulse-like sense that washes over the surrounding area and reveals everything briefly in striking purple. Otherwise the world is covered in darkness and only visible when it is very close. Presumably, this is the developer's impression of what it is like to be a bat, or at least what it is like to sense like one. However, because humans lack the actual sensory organs for perceiving the world like a bat, the experience is simulated through vision (Figure 5.2).

Several games from the Global Game Jam 2014 tried to portray the experience of playing a bat, for example *Breaking Bat* (2014) and *Echo* (2014). These games use techniques similar to the earlier *Hærfest*, with light being used as metaphor for the bat's ability to sense its surroundings. All three of these games use synesthetic design, mapping one sense (echolocation) to another sense (sight).

Global Game Jam 2014 included another game, confusingly also named *Echo* (2014), that tried to portray the experience of being a bat without synesthetic design. Playing it requires (at least) two players: one referred to as "the bat" and another called "the eyes". The bat is blindfolded and given headphones that the eyes can send



Figure 5.2 Sensing the surroundings in *Hærfest* (Technically Finished 2009; image via Mobygames).

audio messages to. The goal of the game is for the eyes to navigate the bat through a physical maze using a computer to send audio messages to the bat. This approach does not use synesthetic design, instead letting the second player to act as the bat's sense of space. Because that information is conveyed through hearing, the bat player has to use their hearing to navigate a space – not an easy task for someone not used to that kind of navigation.

Aliens vs. Predator

Aliens vs. Predator (Rebellion Developments 2010) is a perfect example for examining how videogames portray alien experiences: it features gameplay with three protagonists, two of which are alien. All three have a unique storyline, shown from their perspective.

The three storylines are intertwined, all relating to the planet BG 386. The Weyland-Yutani corporation is breeding aliens in a laboratory that is located next to an ancient predator temple. While examining the temple, the Weyland-Yutani accidentally activates a predator device. The device temporarily deactivates their systems, thus freeing the aliens the Weyland-Yutani was breeding from their captivity. The device also sends a distress signal to the predators' home planet. The predators send a party of young predators to investigate, while a group of marines is also sent to combat the aliens freed from the Weyland-Yutani breeding facility.

The first group of predators sent to the planet is killed, which prompts the predators to send in a more experienced hunter. When it arrives, it

destroys the marine ship orbiting the planet. Some of the marines survive the destruction of their ship on a smaller space vessel. The predator also lands, trying to make sure that humans do not tamper with the bodies of the dead predators from the first group. The human protagonist is one of the surviving marines. The second playable character is the more experienced predator sent to the planet to make sure humans do not desecrate the bodies of the first group sent there. The last player character is one of the aliens that is freed during the power-out caused by the activation of the predator device.

Afraid of the Dark: Playing as a Human

Playing the human protagonist – called simply Rookie by the other characters in the game – presents a fairly standard view of human perception. The view is first-person, meaning that the world is portrayed through Rookie’s eyes. Most of the areas are dark, so the world is experienced with the help of the shoulder-mounted flashlight. Only a small area is in the visual focus, with most of the world covered in darkness. Rookie can also throw flares, providing stationary light in a small area. Perhaps the most important tool for getting information about the surroundings is the motion sensor, which produces constant sound while scanning the surroundings and emits a beep whenever it detects movement. Movement is also shown on the small indicator on the lower left side of the screen. The motion sensor seems to be a part of a heads-up display, worn by Rookie, meaning it is supposed to indicate things also visible to him. The heads-up display shows an objective marker, a small arrow on top of the motion tracker, to show the direction of the next objective (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3 A dark room, seen in the light of a gun-mounted flashlight.

The combination of darkness, small areas of light, and the beeping of the motion sensor combine to create a claustrophobic, tense atmosphere. The motion sensor is an iconic part of the *Aliens vs. Predator* franchise, a technological tool to enhance the limited senses humans naturally possess. It is also a constant source of dread: a beep might mean deadly creatures in the dark – or not, as it is also prone to false positives.

The only refuge against the enemies in the dark is the arsenal of weapons at Rookie's disposal. He starts the game with only a pistol, but can later find an assault rifle, a shotgun, a flame-thrower, and an automatically aiming smartgun. If wounded by the aliens or other threats, Rookie can heal himself with stims, medical syringes that he sticks to his wrist. There is a limited supply of these, but Rookie is also easily killed, so there is a big incentive to use them as often as possible. He can also access areas off-limits to most other personnel on the planet because he carries a hacking device capable of opening locked doors. Through using these technological apparatuses, Rookie is able to survive in the hostile environment, despite being the weakest type of organism around.

Playing Rookie is an experience of uncertainty. Human senses are limited, and the darkness can only be made to make sense with the help of technology. The flashlight is the main source of light, but the motion sensor is almost as important, as it warns about the approaching aliens. Humans in *Aliens vs. Predator* are frail and slow and lack the sensory capabilities of the other species. It is only with technology – especially weapons – they are able to match, and best, the natural abilities of their enemies.

“A Structurally Perfect Organism”: Playing as an Alien

In comparison to Rookie, the alien – known as Specimen 6 by the Weyland-Yutani – is much more capable. It can see in almost complete darkness and can use its other senses to track prey – meaning humans – without any light sources. It is fast, heals quickly, and can rip humans to pieces with its claws and sharp tail.

These abilities are presented to the player in a short tutorial, which is framed as a testing of Specimen 6's abilities by the Weyland-Yutani scientists. Victims of increasing dangerousness are sent into a room with it, allowing the player to learn the abilities Specimen 6 possesses: walking on walls, seeing in the dark, sensing its prey through walls, moving and attacking quickly and ferociously.⁴

Specimen 6's ability to see in the dark is easily achieved by making the environment slightly less dark for the player. The world is still dark, but navigation is easier than it was for Rookie because the world is not focused on a small area of light. Specimen 6 is also able to sense the presence of humans. A tutorial text states that “The smell of a human betrays its nature”. In practice, this means that different types of humans have outlines of different colors, with civilians differing from hostile

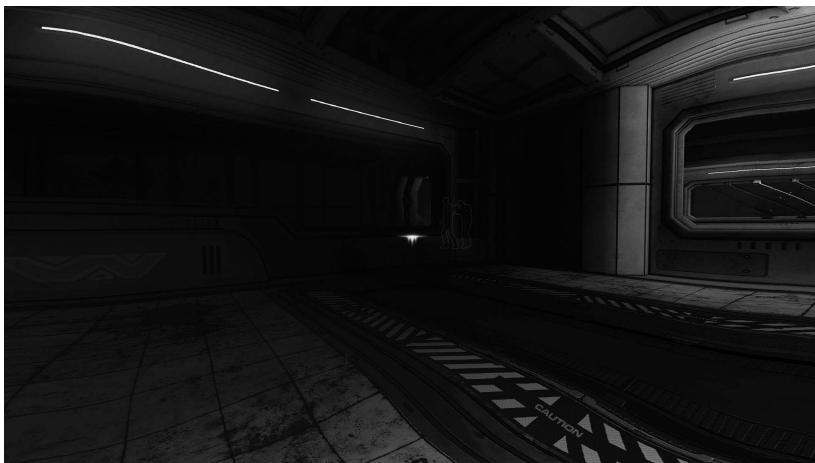


Figure 5.4 Specimen 6 stalking human prey through the wall.

prey. The tutorial continues by stating that “the stronger their scent, the greater the danger they pose” (Figure 5.4).

The text seems to imply that it is the alien’s sense of smell that it uses in detecting humans. This information is conveyed to the player through a visual outline around human characters, seen even through walls (see previous figure). This is an example of synesthetic design, converting olfactory stimuli into visual representations. It is unclear how, exactly, the alien sense of smell works as it can smell even humans in enclosed spaces but has no information on how the characters have moved around or how many of them have been present in a space; humans may have a scent, but it is not present in the spaces they have occupied. The representation of scent seems to be simplified into a singular visual outline.⁵

Easily the most disorienting part of playing *Specimen 6* is its ability to walk on any surface. This differs greatly from human everyday experiences of how humans relate to gravity, verticality, and surfaces. It takes even the most experienced human climbers a great deal of effort to climb vertical surfaces, and the speed is much slower than what they can accomplish on horizontal surfaces. In comparison, *Specimen 6* can move on any surface much faster than a human can run, and switch between surfaces of different orientations with dizzying speed. This means that all surfaces are affordances for movement, whether they are upside down, vertical, or horizontal.

An indicator in the middle of the screen always points toward the floor to make it easier for the player to get their bearings after running around the walls and ceiling (see previous figure). This crosshair is also used to aim jumps and attacks, but it is probably not appropriate to read it

literally as part of Specimen 6's visual field (cf. Jørgensen 2013). Instead, it is another example of synesthetic design, conveying to the player what humans usually experience with the help of their inner ear and through their whole body: the effect of gravity, a sense of up and down. The game cannot convey the feeling of your body being pulled toward the ground, so instead, it relays this experience with a visual indicator. A comprehensively bodily sense is translated into a visual representation.

The indicator serves another purpose by changing color: it tells you whether Specimen 6 is covered by darkness or not. The indicator is completely light yellow when Specimen 6 is in direct light and turns smaller when it moves toward darkness, turning black in the middle when the alien is completely covered in darkness. There are few possible ways of reading this: it is possible that the indicator simply corresponds to how much light is hitting Specimen 6's visual organs, and is just another way for the player to evaluate the surroundings – they could also just look around and see how much light there is in the surroundings. It is also possible that this indicator is supposed to suggest that the alien possesses another sense, an ability to sense how much light it is in. This could be likened to a human sensing sunlight touching their skin. The tutorial simply states that “In the shadows, you are almost invisible”.

However, the alien's relation to darkness is never explained. Clearly, they are accustomed to using darkness against their prey, which seems to imply that they are used to being more perceptive and adapted to darkness than their prey.

The experience of playing Specimen 6 is alien. It moves quickly on all surfaces, interacts with its surroundings mostly by killing, and stays hidden until it is ready to strike at its prey. It is very much like a predatory animal, preying on the humans wandering in its territory.

“Those Creatures You Hunt”: Playing as a Predator

The last of the player characters is the predator, who is never named in the single player game, but is identified as Dark in the multiplayer part of the game. He starts the game with a demonstration of superiority, first killing aliens in close combat and then stalking and killing humans.⁶ His abilities are a combination of physical qualities and advanced technology.

Dark is able to use the technology in his mask to choose three different modes of seeing, two of which are available at the beginning of the game. Two of these modes are specialized in seeing particular prey (humans and aliens), while the third one is closer to the human visual experience, with any unnatural parts explained by the heads-up display of the helmet Dark is wearing. The two modes specialized in hunting particular prey use strong color filters to achieve a strong contrast, with enemies marked by clear, bright colors. The vision mode for hunting humans uses a visual look often associated with thermal vision⁷ (Figure 5.5).

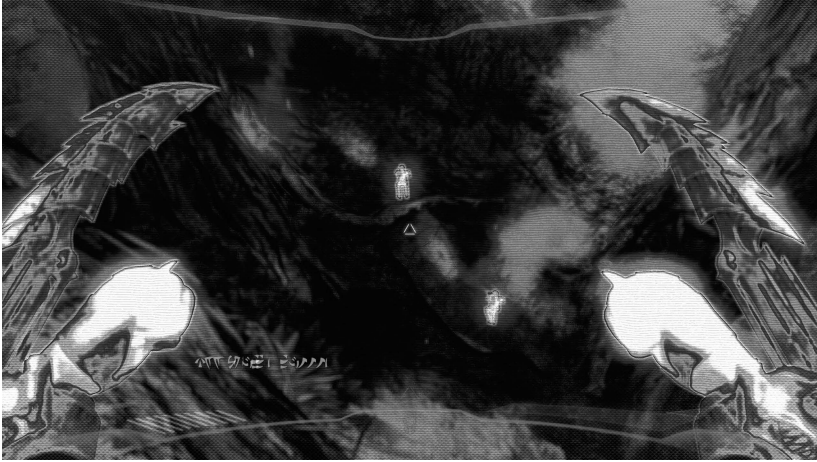


Figure 5.5 The predator stalking human prey with thermal vision.



Figure 5.6 The predator sight without filters.

The game is played from Dark's perspective, with the mask covering his face, so it is difficult to separate what is his unaugmented experience and what is part of the mask's technology. However, there is one part of the game that clarifies this. Dark encounters a tomb of an ancient predator and recovers his mask. Dark removes his own mask and replaces it with the one he found. The sequence is shown from a first-person perspective, and when Dark removes his mask, the visual experience is equivalent to human vision. Therefore, it seems likely then that the predator's visual experience of the world is similar to the human experience⁸ (Figure 5.6).

The way the predator moves around is close to human movement. It walks and runs, but because it is much stronger, it can also jump to places not available to humans. The player can aim the jumps using a special indicator that appears when aiming them, making it clear where and how far the jump will take Dark. The game would work without the indicator as well, forcing the player to learn by trial-and-error how far Dark can jump. However, this would change the experience of playing Dark considerably. Now the jumping is deliberate as the player knows exactly where the jump will end – unless they aim the jump in haste. The indicator could be read as a representation of Dark's ability to evaluate the aim and length of his jumps. It is implicit, embodied knowledge made explicit for the player through a visual indicator.

His great strength means that Dark can also take on both humans and aliens in close combat. In fact, aliens are much less a threat to the predator than they are to humans, and even a large group of aliens can be killed with the predator's many weapons. Humans are even less of a threat. If close by, Dark can simply grab them and tear them apart. Only human technology – guns, turrets, combat androids – is a real threat to the predator.

Dark's natural abilities are enhanced by advanced technology. In addition to the vision-enhancing mask, Dark has the ability to turn transparent, almost invisible, with a technology called Cloak. When hidden in this manner, humans are unable to see him, unless he is very close to them. Dark can heal himself with a device that consists of two sets of needles that he sticks into himself, apparently hurting him because he roars in pain. The mask he wears is also able to mimic human voices, enabling him to lure unsuspecting humans away from their allies and toward their deaths. Predators are not without their own weapons technology, which combines archaic weapons with advanced energy weapons. Dark uses sharp blades worn on the wrists, a retractable spear, a self-guiding, thrown disc, mines, and a plasma weapon worn on the shoulder.

Although in some senses Dark is closer to humans than aliens, with his advanced technology and culture, the experience of playing him is probably closer to the alien. He stalks human prey, carefully waiting for opportunities to tear them apart in close combat. However, when this fails, he can fall back to using his technology. Dark is powerful, in many senses of the word. With his great physical power, he is able to jump around to areas that would be unreachable to humans. From atop high vantage points, he can survey as the humans nervously huddle together and try to guard themselves against their superior enemies.

Alien Experience, Human Technology

This chapter has highlighted the practice of *synesthetic design* in portraying nonhuman experiences in videogames. Humans have limited

sensory capabilities, so things that would be hard to experience or conceptualize are instead translated into forms that are more easily grasped. Often this happens by turning other senses into visual indicators, since vision is usually so dominant in making sense of the world for humans. This might also be due to conventions within the medium – even the name “videogame” refers to an experience of looking at moving pictures.

Some of the experiences that are represented visually would be hard to represent otherwise. For example, the experience of feeling what is up and what is down that is indicated by an arrow when playing Specimen 6 is hard to convey with other means. However, it seems that the game takes the easy way out in other cases. It seems, for example, that both Dark and Specimen 6 hear sounds in very similar manner than humans, even though their auditory systems are presumably very different from humans. They do make nonhuman sounds, screeching, gurgling, and clicking while hunting their way through the levels, but both their own sounds and the noises made by other beings sound the same as when playing Rookie. There is no reason the sounds experienced while playing the two alien creatures in the game had to correspond to the ones heard while playing Rookie.

While experiencing the different bodily representations of Dark and Rookie is one way *Aliens vs. Predator* creates the alienness of playing something nonhuman, it also requires the player to take on a very particular perspective on humans. Killing other humans in videogames is not uncommon, but hunting your own species is rarer. The antagonism between the species cannot be described as a fair fight: it is often easy to avoid the humans encountered during the game, especially when playing as Dark. The choice to kill humans is more akin to sport than to fight. This is fitting, since the predators treat it like a mixture between sport and a rite of passage.

When playing as Specimen 6, the relation is even more alien. In addition to being prey to an alien hunter, humans are also a way to procreate. If Specimen 6 grabs a non-combatant human from behind, it can hold the human in place while a small alien facehugger appears from somewhere off-screen and plants itself on the human’s face. The human collapses helplessly, while the facehugger uses it as a host for breeding more aliens. Humans are not treated by Specimen 6 only as prey, but also as unwilling hosts.

While humans are reduced to the roles of prey and host, there is one factor that seems to give them a fighting chance against the physically superior aliens: technology. Using different technological apparatuses, humans are able to match the other species. Rookie is not able to physically best aliens or predators, but using his gun he can kill dozens of them during the campaign. He is almost blind in the dark, but using his flashlight, he can see. The motion sensor is also an example of this,

allowing Rookie to sense threats around him. The motion sensor also highlights how technology becomes embodied, turning into just another way of sensing the surroundings.

Even the predators that are technologically more advanced than humans in many ways still have to be wary of human technology. Right from the beginning of the game, the autonomous turrets humans use are a threat to Dark, even when the humans themselves are not. Later in the game, Dark encounters even more advanced technological threats as Weyland-Yutani military androids try to stop him. These are human-shaped, but much more dangerous than the human enemies encountered before.

The game seems to imply that humans have an ambivalent relation to technology. Technology is what makes humans capable of meeting the other species on an even level, even when the capabilities given by nature make them weaker. But humans are also very reliant on that technology, unable to survive without it. The weapons Dark uses seem like tools for sport and ritual, and he is able to fight his enemies even without them. One of the defining weapons he uses is the set of blades attached to his forearm. Rookie, on the other hand, needs his flashlight, motion sensor, and weapons in order to have a fighting chance of surviving.

Creating Alien Experiences

It seems that while there are differences in playing the different characters in *Aliens vs. Predator*, there is also a lot of common ground, from the similar goal-structure to the constant fighting of similar enemies. What would a game that took into account all the embodied differences look like? Making such a game might not be easy, but at least it would pay attention to the following things:

- 1 The game would focus on different things when playing different characters: different things are important for bats or aliens than for humans. For example, much of *Aliens vs. Predator* is focused on proceeding through areas that are shut off by electronic locks. Rookie hacks these locks, while Dark and Specimen 6 bash the control panels to gain access. This is a remarkably similar way to proceed in the game despite the differences between the characters. This feels particularly artificial in Specimen 6's case: it is able to walk on walls and could presumably bypass most (but not all) obstacles by finding an alternative route.
- 2 Different things would be appealing or repulsive, based on the embodied experiences with these things. For example, the aliens secrete a thick resin that they use to build nests and cocoon prey. This seems repulsive to humans, but would be perfectly normal to the aliens in question. *Aliens vs. Predator* does use this to a great effect by

making Rookie proceed through areas enveloped by alien cocoons, which highlights the alienness of these areas. However, that is the easiest way of using this aspect of embodiment, because it draws on our embodied experiences as humans.

- 3 Different things would seem dangerous, based on what kinds of things endanger the creatures. For example, the predators discussed in this chapter routinely hunt aliens, meaning that they have a very different attitude toward them than humans. The aliens are usually portrayed as afraid of fire, but this does not seem to play a large role in *Aliens vs. Predator*. Some of the marines encountered use flamethrowers, but they are not a particularly serious threat. Portraying emotional reactions can be difficult, since they are partially dependent on the player. However, other games deal with similar situations by, for example, making characters that are afraid less effective in combat.
- 4 The game would focus less on visual input in cases where other senses are more important. However, these experiences can be hard to translate to humans, which is why most games seem to translate other senses to visual indicators. This applies to senses not possessed by humans: for example, the alien light-sense in *Aliens vs. Predator*.

Combining these approaches would enable one to design a game that would take embodiment into account more comprehensively. However, it is possible that a game focused on conveying the embodied experience of something completely alien would not be particularly playable, since many of the compromises made in the examples discussed in this chapter are due to design choices made to allow better gameplay experiences. The fact that the examples discussed are games and not simulations intended for the purpose of simulating embodiment is important. Nonhuman experiences are, by definition, alien, which might explain why games tend to use the human experience as the norm. Alien experiences are then portrayed by slight changes in that default approach. Another reason for adopting this approach is probably related to the economics of creating entertainment products. For example, it is more cost-effective to create one set of sound effects and use them in all of the three campaigns instead of creating unique sound effects for each Dark, Specimen 6, and Rookie.

The relation of this discussion to technology merits a mention. While the alien relies on its physical abilities, both the human and predator protagonists lean heavily on their technologies. Technology enhances their senses and allows them to recover from harm and fight against enemies that would be impossible to best without their tools. This is despite the predator being physically the most powerful of all three of the characters – it would seem to need technology less than the alien.

However, it is not that straightforward to tell apart the experience of embodiment with and without technology. Technology tends to become

normalized and embodied: eyeglasses tend to become the norm for seeing after wearing them for a while, while lacking them runs counter to everyday experiences of always having them on (cf. Hirose 2002; Merleau-Ponty 2002). In games where technology plays an important role, using that technology becomes as natural as any other form of interacting with the surrounding. For example, Batman in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009) may scale a wall and use his Detective Mode and punch enemies, with all of the modes of interaction feeling as essential to being Batman. This is as true for playing Rookie and Dark, as many of their essential abilities are based on the technologies they are using.

As the comparison to Batman shows, there is no one way of being human. Both Rookie and Batman rely on technology to solve problems and survive, but being Rookie and being Batman are very different kinds of experiences. The comparison to the other ways of being in *Aliens vs. Predator* highlights certain types of being human, which would be absent if those other ways of being were absent. The game produces a certain way of being human: uncertain, afraid, and weak, but ultimately triumphant due to technological tools – and some luck. Every danger and adversity can be overcome with perseverance. Ultimately, the game seems to carry the same kind of anthropocentrism typical to most science fiction narratives. Human may be weak and hunted, but their experiences are what matter.

Notes

- 1 Embodied, situated, and grounded cognition each deal with slightly different things, but for the purposes of this chapter, they are closely related. In cognitive literary studies, similar approaches are sometimes grouped together as “e-approaches”, because they concern with the “enactive, embedded, embodied and extended qualities of the mind” (Kukkonen and Caracciolo 2014, 261). The rest of this chapter focuses on the idea of embodied cognition.
- 2 There is also a separate category of play where you play objects or things, like *I am Bread* (Bossa Studios 2015). I will here mostly focus on playing things that are nonhuman, but still easily recognized as intentional beings: animals, aliens, and fantasy creatures.
- 3 Some games intentionally aim for unnatural visual look while still portraying human experiences, usually for aesthetic reasons. For example, *dys4ia* (2012) uses simplified pixel-graphics and abstract shapes to illustrate the experience of going through hormone replacement therapy.
- 4 Another game in the franchise, *Alien: Isolation* (Creative Assembly 2014), also portrays aliens as deadly, perceptive, and dangerous, but this is often invalidated by events in the game where an alien fails to notice the protagonist if she is even slightly hidden. The aliens are still the most deadly thing present in the game.
- 5 This seems to differ from how the alien senses are represented in other media, like the movie franchise or the multiple comic books published. These media do not mention sophisticated olfactory senses, while the aliens are mentioned as being able to sense heat and have specialized hearing. I will here focus only on the *Alien vs. Predator* game and how it portrays things.

- 6 The gender of the predator is never made explicit, but other media in the franchise portray the predator society as very sexist, with limited roles reserved for female predators. It is likely that the predator played is male.
- 7 Humans in other videogames regularly use similar technology to enhance their vision. For example, in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009), Batman can use Detective Mode to see things humans normally cannot see. His senses are also enhanced by technological means, and it is portrayed in the game in a manner similar to how the predator's visual overlays work. Other games that use a mechanic similar to *Batman's* Detective mode include games like *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft Montreal 2007), *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios 2012), and *Hitman: Absolution* (IO Interactive 2012). In some of these games, the mechanic represents specialized training or mystical ability, not technological apparatuses.
- 8 There are different versions of the predator species in different media of the franchise, and how their senses are portrayed is not always consistent. The canonical version seems to be that the infrared vision is the predators' natural vision, but this does not seem to be true in the game being examined.

References

- Adams, Fred. 2010. "Embodied Cognition." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 9 (4): 619–628. doi: 10.1007/s11097-010-9175-x
- Allison, Fraser. 2015. "Whose Mind Is the Signal? Focalization in Video Game Narratives." In *DiGRA 2015: Diversity of Play*, 1–16. Lüneburg: DiGRA.
- Anderson, Michael L. 2003. "Embodied Cognition: A Field Guide." *Artificial Intelligence* 149 (1): 91–130. doi: 10.1016/S0004-3702(03)00054-7
- Anthropy, Anna. 2012. *dys4ia*. <http://wizardofvore.itch.io/dys4ia>.
- Arkane Studios. 2012. *Dishonored*. Rockville, MA: Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One; Bethesda Softworks.
- Barsalou, Lawrence W. 2008. "Grounded Cognition." *Annual Review of Psychology* 59 (January): 617–645. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093639
- Bossa Studios. 2015. *I Am Bread*. London: Microsoft Windows, OS X, PlayStation 4, iOS; Bossa Studios.
- Creative Assembly. 2014. *Alien: Isolation*. Tokyo, Japan: Linux, Microsoft Windows, OS X, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One; Sega.
- Gualeni, Stefano. 2015. *Virtual Worlds as Philosophical Tools: How to Philosophize with a Digital Hammer*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- IO Interactive. 2012. *Hitman: Absolution*. Tokyo, Japan: Microsoft Windows, OS X, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360; Square Enix.
- Jørgensen, Kristine. 2013. *Gameworld Interfaces*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Klei Entertainment. 2012. *Mark of the Ninja*. Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows, Linux, OS X; Microsoft Studios.
- Kukkonen, Karin, and Marco Caracciolo. 2014. "Introduction: What Is the 'Second Generation?'" *Style* 48 (3): 261–274.
- Lankoski, Petri. 2011. "Player Character Engagement in Computer Games." *Games and Culture* 6 (4): 291–311. doi: 10.1177/1555412010391088
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge.

- Nagel, Thomas. 1974. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435–450. www.jstor.org/stable/2183914.
- Rebellion Developments. 2010. *Aliens vs. Predator*. Tokyo: Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360; Sega.
- Rocksteady Studios. 2009. *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Wimbledon: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Mac OSX, Microsoft Windows; Eidos Interactive.
- Technically Finished. 2009. *Haerfest*. Windows.
- Ubisoft Montreal. 2007. *Assassin's Creed*. PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows; Ubisoft.
- Valve Corporation. 2009. *Left 4 Dead 2*. Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, OS X, Linux. *Left 4 Dead*. Bellevue, Washington: Valve Corporation.
- Wilson, Margaret. 2002. "Six Views of Embodied Cognition." *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 9 (4): 625–636. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12613670.