

<b>Title:</b>	Ludic decisions on screen and paper: anti-agency in <i>If on a winter's night a traveler</i> and <i>The Stanley Parable</i>
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## Abstract

To writer and director Davey Wreden, *The Stanley Parable* is not a power struggle between the creator and the player, nor is it a power struggle between Stanley and the narrator; it is a game about understanding these author-player dynamics and identifying the degree of agency and control one might be able to exercise within these narratological constraints. The same is arguably true for Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. The novel is an opportunity for the reader to read into second-person pronouns and the author's affirmations, for the two to work together despite these oppositional, at times even antagonistic narrative dynamics. But regardless of how much power the author decides to defer to the audience, be it in the literary or gamic realms of *ludos*, the authorial position, by definition, is one of certainty. Of course, this is not to undermine the faculties of the reader/player, nor is it to cede complete authority to the creator. Agency is simultaneously concrete and illusory: *The Stanley Parable's* doors are at the same time a celebration of agential procedurality and a myriad of fully scripted plot points, *If on a winter's night's* narrator simultaneously a bastion of authorial power and the Reader's confidant. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that is paradoxically complemented with mutually assured destruction. Yet, the player/author still *needs* an authorial voice to validate and legitimise their ability to deliberate control within the narrative. The player's role as a participatory element in the game-space falls back on the material constraints of the novel-form; that is, any decisions made in the game-space should be considered anti-agential. As such, what remains constant across both gamic and literary mediums is the author's narrative voice: the harbinger of the traditional novel-form.

## Reflection

I initially chose this project to attempt to draw some boundaries of agency in literary and gamic mediums, as such, it functions more a prologue than as a self-sustaining source of knowledge. This is to say that there is a lot more to be understood regarding how, within these boundaries, agency is depicted in literature and how games implement systems that make use of the player's decision-making capabilities to tell stories, ask questions, and speak truth to power. To analyse the limitations of agency in the game-form is to gain a better understanding of how games can sensitively and intelligently contend with the depiction of the experiences of the oppressed, to understand the perennial anxieties of freedom and alienation. Raoul Vaneigem wrote that "the desire to play has returned to abolish the hierarchical society which banished it", and that, I think, is the significance, perhaps not of this paper, but of analyses of procedural agency in games going forward.