# Moving Image Analysis of *God of War*

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a moving image analysis of *God of War*. This article will examine *God of War* using classic techniques of other moving image mediums, specifically film, including camera movements, sound, and mise-en-scene in order to express the emotions and ideas the game presents to its players by making meanings from the images presented during the interactive parts of the game.

## Keywords

mise-en-scene, setting, costume, makeup, lighting, staging, space, time, cinematography, sound

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The creators of the video game *God of War* set out to create an epic game. In order to present to the player an experience of epic proportions, including huge, expansive settings and an immersive, believable world, the makers of the game payed great attention to the mise-en-scene of each level, to the epic-sounding score with spot-on sound effects, and its amazing camera system that helped to frame every part of the game into a playable, yet meaningful composition. The makers of the game definitely put a lot of thought into creating a humongous experience, akin to the classic epics of other mediums, for the player to throw themselves into.



**Figure 1:** *God of War* **takes advantage of all the aspects of mise-en-scene as shown in this picture.**

## 2. MISE-EN-SCENE

Mise-en-scene in *God of War* is used to pull the player into the world presented in the game. The game fills its settings with intricate details, combining real-life architecture with supernatural elements in a seamless manner. The costume and makeup design of the player controlled character, Kratos, is used to tie the character to the background story of Kratos which is slowly unveiled throughout the game's cut scenes. Lighting is used throughout the game to enhance the emotion conveyed by the specific scene. Staging is used occasionally with computer controlled characters to add an edge of realism to certain moments of the game, and staging is somewhat used during the frequent battles and puzzles in the game. Space is an integral part of the gameplay with many of the puzzles and battles relying on the spaces created in the game. Time is never really an element of the interactive portions of the game with it mainly flowing forward from the point your character is dropped into Athens. The cut scenes generally go backwards in time and it could have added another level of interest had some of those sections of Kratos' past been playable. The most important elements of mise-en-scene used in the game are further discussed below.



**Figure 2: In this picture the detail payed to the setting can be seen with elaborate designs being displayed in the foreground and the ultimate goal of the player presented in the background as Aries who is destroying the beautiful city of Athens and therefore the settings surrounding the player**

### 2.12.1 Setting

Every setting Kratos encounters combines fiction with reality utilizing architectural styles from ancient Greece while at the same time showing supernatural elements that fit in with the story world of the game. Nearly every level is designed with one linear path throughout the level, with occasional side-paths leading to extra chests of experience points or health or magic power ups. The general linearity of the levels allows for great care to be taken in the design of the settings. Every movement through the virtual spaces of the game shows of the elaborate settings with huge monuments, creatures, etc. filling the backgrounds of almost every stage. This combined with the detailed foreground Grecian architecture and other magical looking items that Kratos encounters gives the game and the player an immense sense of purpose within the story world. Although the player is small in

contrast to the many grandiose settings, having control within that world gives the player the feeling that they are actually changing things and making a difference of epic proportions. This can really be seen in Figure 2, where Kratos is surrounded in the foreground by an elaborate floor design and Greek architecture on the left side of the image, yet in the background is the giant Aries with the sky tumultuous above him destroying the armies of Athens. As that particular level pans out Kratos is slowly approaching Aries, who he has set out to destroy, and Aries grows larger and larger in the background reiterating to the player that their actions are effecting things on epic proportions and that the goal of the game is to get to Aries and destroy him, reinforcing the story told mainly in the cut scenes.

## 2.2 Costume & Makeup

Costume and makeup is a very important part of this game. From Kratos' war-like body tattoos which drive home to the player the war-like and brash, spartan nature of Kratos to the nearly nude oracle who is beautiful and at the same time wise. *God of War* uses nudity in a couple of sections of the game. The first section shows topless women in Kratos' bed. Here the women are used as objects to represent the personality of Kratos as a rash and unsatisfied being. The nearly nude oracle serves more as a reference to Greek culture from other mediums. In films such as *Jason and the Argonauts* or more recently *300* women are shown as nearly or completely nude. By including nudity in the game the game makers are trying to say that *God of War* along with its transmedia cousins is just as much a work of art and just as sincere in its story and representative elements. The pale skin of Kratos is also important as it represents the hardships of Kratos' past that are revealed in the cut scenes. The pale skin is revealed at one point to be the ashes of his dead loved ones, binded to his skin as an ever reminder of their death at his hands. By having the character pale white throughout the interactive portions of the game, the game makers are providing a constant reminder to the players of Kratos' character and the reasons for continuing along the hard paths ahead. It also serves as a reasonable question that drives the player to complete more of the game until the answer is revealed. From the costumes of the gods to the elaborate monsters encountered in the game, much detail was placed upon the costume and makeup design in the game. The majority of the monster and god costume/makeup designs serve to reinforce the overall theme of vastness, that the game is epic and therefore the bosses and monsters are as well.

## 2.3 Lighting

Lighting is used to convey the moods of the areas presented. The lighting starts very dark in the initial encounter with Athens at night with very little light given from torches and other such light sources. As the game progresses different lights are used for different settings. For instance, during the underwater scenes, which are peaceful and without monsters, the entire scenes are bathed in blue and green with shimmering and shiny artifacts. The pale light that cuts through the water at different moments reiterates the peaceful breathing room that the player has while underwater. In contrast to this is the bright desert sections of the game that create a monochromatic yellow-orange area that reinforces the lack of definite direction that the player is supposed to feel at that moment. Another section where lighting is amazingly helpful for creating a foreboding sense of doom is the

Hades section of Pandora's temple where the player is constantly encountering dark reds and black. This color scheme is used again, with more emphasis on red than black, later when the player must actually fight through Hades itself. The red and black scheme emphasizes the theme of war from the title and gives the player the sense that many epic hardships will lay ahead. These parts of the game were also a little more scary than the areas of the game, such as the Oracle's temple, where every composition is filled with a pallid blue, green scheme giving the player a since of calm, rather than impending action.



**Figure 3:** *God of War* **uses space to its advantage. This picture shows a puzzle in the direct background of the character that must be solved. In the middle far-background is a hidden area the player can find and to the bottom right in the background is where the player will eventually end up after solving the puzzle. Space is used to set up incentives for the player to explore.**

## 2.22.5 Space

Space is one of, if not **the**, most important elements in every video game. *God of War* is no less dependent on its use of space. *God of War* utilizes space for three main reasons. The first reason is for the action elements of the game. The game contains spaces that close off areas from the player so that they must battle with enemies before progressing. In boss battles, especially the extremely large bosses, the battle space must be utilized by the player in order to add extra damage to the boss. For example, at one point Kratos must battle an armor-clad minotaur. The player has multiple options as to how to defeat the minotaur. They can hack and slash away at the minotaur and occasionally complete a context sensitive mini-interactive-cut scene which then sets the minotaur in an unconscious state where the player can run to a lever and pull it to shoot the minotaur with a flaming log. Or the player can simply slash and dodge until the minotaur eventually dies. The more cinematic battle involves the interactive cut scene and utilization of the lever from within the space. I think the lever has to be utilized at least twice, once to start the battle and once to end it, but it can also be utilized during battle as an extension of Kratos' weapons. Using objects or active things within the space during battles and the use of space to hem in or force players into battles are both ways that the spaces of the game add to the interactivity and immersion of the player. In addition, the creators generally create huge creatures to battle and so the methods of

penning in these creatures usually add to the overall epic scale of the game or the feeling that one is playing an epic. The second major use of space in the game is for puzzle solving gameplay. Many spatial puzzles, akin to Zelda, are encountered throughout the game. The interesting thing about the puzzles in *God of War* is that they encourage the player to explore the boundaries of the spaces presented, many times leading players to discovering secret areas, such as the top of the waterfall pictured in the background of Figure 3. Another interesting aspect to the puzzles in the game are that they are generally timed puzzles with death following if not done correctly. Before instigating the timed puzzles the player learns to survey their surrounding spaces just so he or she will have an idea as to what they should do before coming to their quick death. The third use of space in the game is to emphasize the epic scale of the settings and the story and to keep the player focused on the goals at hand. For instance in the level depicted in Figure 2, the player is constantly reminded of the epic proportion of their actions and the ultimate goal of reaching Aries, who is always growing larger in the background. The goal setting nature of the setting, which is helped largely by the cinematography of the game is also exemplified in Figure 3 by the future destination of the player, shown in the bottom right of the background. *God of War* uses spaces in many interesting ways, culminating the 1-dimensional uses of spaces in other games, such as the Mario platformers or Zelda puzzle games of Nintendo, while adding a glossy epic feel to the entire gaming experience.



Figure 4: *God of War* has a very intuitive camera that frames for epic compositions while assisting rather than hindering gameplay.

# 3.CINEMATOGRAPHY

The camera system is absolutely astounding in *God of War*. The camera is designed to make epic compositions while still framing the player in such a way that he or she can fully play the game without hindrance. Taking more than a few cues from Silicon Knights' *Eternal Darkness* the makers of *God of War* use the camera to not only create meaning within tight spaces like *Eternal Darkness*, but they also allow the camera to expand and open up the settings and spaces to the user. The camera works with the spacing to direct the user toward goals while framing everything to fit with the epic themes of the game. The camera also makes smart decisions during play so that the player rarely if ever has to

worry about not being able to see something that he or she wishes to reach or destroy. Player through the game it is easy to see that much care was taken in the framing of each particular part of the game. Nearly every room the camera behaves in a different way in order to take full advantage of the spaces and settings surrounding the player. For instance, when climbing up mountainsides, such as in Figure 3, the camera zooms in and out taking a more sideways view of the environment placing the camera in the classic 2D platformer perspective. This specific type of camera positioning is beneficial for two reasons. One it draws upon the established conventions of platformers allowing the player to more easily traverse the environment. Also, this platformer-esque perspective nicely hides spaces to come increasing the shock value and making noticeable the camera movements when the camera eventually pans over to show the surrounding areas, such as is depicted in Figure 3. The camera is also used as a reference to epic presentations from other medias. For instance, when entering the desert the camera stops and the player is still in control of Kratos as Kratos is lead shrinking into the desert of the background. The creators of this game definitely had knowledge of filmic techniques when making the game. They also break the boundaries of films by having the camera float in unreachable positions, such as when the camera floats up and through the ceiling while looking down upon spiral staircases every time Kratos goes down a spiral staircase. The camera moves down level by level with Kratos creating a foreboding feeling of trials to come. Or, like in Figure 4, the camera eschews the viewing angle giving the player the dizzy feeling that Kratos himself might feel while hanging on the edge of a great chasm. Great care was taken to intensify the epic proportions of the game by taking advantage of camera framing and movement. There are even a few necessary cuts in the game, but none are really used as means of making meaning. The few cuts are mainly used to transition to a new room or to a cut scene. The one sort of negatory aspect of the camera compositions is the HUD that helps the player know their health, what spell or weapon they have chosen, etc. While the HUD does disappear until needed during the exploratory sections of the game, it is nearly ever present during battles. The art style of the HUD reinforces the Greek themes and even the personality of Kratos, through subtle colorings, etc. The HUD is necessary from a gameplay aspect and is very refined, just as everything else in the game. It does distract slightly from the compositions, but it only appears when needed so the distraction is minimal and temporary, but it should be noted as a distractor from the meanings made from the moving images presented by the game.

# 4.SOUND

The musical score is really what makes the sound in this game. Of course sound effects are utilized, but they are not extremely different from other games or meaningful in their uses. What stands out sound-wise in the game is its use of non-diagetic orchestral scores. Referencing the classic epics of film, during the many platforming stages one could easily recall the music from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and pushing the limits of video game scores in general to epic proportions. Every score encourages the player to continue on while reminding him and her of what has come and why, story wise, he or she is attempting to accomplish the great feats that lay ahead of him or her.

## 5.CONCLUSION

*God of War* takes advantage of film techniques to present an epic work within an interactive medium. While referencing other works from other interactive and non-interactive media and setting a bar for gameplay and camera work, *God of War* presents an epic experience that takes full advantage of mise-en-scene, particularly space and setting, cinematography, and sound.

## 6.REFERENCES

[1]  Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin. *Film Art: An Introduction Seventh Edition.* New York, New York, 2004.