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Literary and Interdisciplinary Aspects of Video Games

Thesis Booklet

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1. The Aim and Results of the Dissertation

The dissertation aims to give a holistic view of video game research and its current state, showcase how *interactive fiction* influenced the evolution of video games, highlight the connections between literature and video games, and offer new terms that can contribute to international research. The dissertation argues that video games, literary pieces, and films are individual media, but they are interconnected and influence each other's progression. While I underline these connections, I also highlight the differences between the three media. What role can story and text play in a fundamentally interactive (*action-oriented*) platform? What makes video games a unique medium?

I propose concepts such as *storyplaying*, *zero narrative* and *story-driven* games, *essential* and *non-essential elements*, and *focalization control*. Although these terms are drawn primarily from literary studies (more specifically, from narratology), they help us better understand video games without declaring the young medium a mere storyteller. *Storyplaying* means that the player can actualize the game's story with the act of play. However, not every video game has a narrative part in it. *Zero narrative* and *story-driven* games are two endpoints of an imaginary scale, where we can fit every video game. *Zero narrative* means that the gameplay is the most essential element without any context, while *story-driven* almost behaves like an interactive film. When we encounter written texts in video games, they can be *essential* or *non-essential*. The former means that the player has to read in order to progress, while the latter refers to textual elements that can be ignored. I see a connection between the role of text and the different game types what I also highlight in the dissertation. I propose the term *focalization control*, which refers to playable characters through which we can see the fictional world. With these terms, the dissertation extends the possibilities of video game research.

In the dissertation, I use many examples from different genres to illustrate my arguments. Moreover, I also focus on literary pieces and movies, where video games can have an essential role (in the sense of content and structure). I also deeply analyze three games with the help of the above-mentioned terms: *God of War*, *God of War: Ragnarök*, and *Detroit: Become Human*. In the conclusion, the dissertation also highlights the artistic value of video games in the context of theatre.

I see video games as a medium that, while drawing on the tools of existing media, maintains its integrity and influences other media. The literary and interdisciplinary dimensions of video games offer a rich field for analysis.

2. The Structure of the Dissertation

The introduction and the first chapter provides a general framework for better understanding video game research. While the introduction focuses on the theoretical background and how video games became part of an academic field, the first chapter highlights the possible categorizations of video games in the context of gameplay, story, and game mechanics.

The second chapter highlights how novels (like *Erebos*, *Erebos 2*, or *T*) can incorporate video games as a topic and how they rely on the structure of the games (as in the case of Balázs Kerber's *Conquest*). These theoretical discussions provide a basis for the analyses in chapters 3 and 4.

In chapter 3, I use methods taken from literary studies to analyze *God of War* and *God of War: Ragnarök*. The chapter focuses on questions like: How is the story structured? What paratextual elements can be discovered? How are the characters interwoven with the main thread of the narrative and how do they fit into the context of Norse mythology? What is the difference between essential and non-essential texts? What narrative levels are present? How can a video game manage time and space?

In chapter 4, I rely on film studies in the case of *Detroit: Become Human*. This chapter answers questions such as: How do the characters' narratives intertwine? Is it a classical or post-classical narrative? What film language devices – plots, camera angles – does the game rely on?

The conclusion looks at the world of art and theatre. Here I show how a stage play (*Sleep No More*) draws on the logic of video games. Then I analyze a *Hamlet* adaptation, which takes place in an open-world, online video game. As I see it, theatre can gain much from drawing inspiration from digital tools.

3. Papers Published in the Field

MTMT data: <https://m2.mtmt.hu/api/author/10070633>

„A Minecraft mint virtuális robinzonád: Világépítés és történetjátás a videójátékokban”, *MESECENTRUM – AZ IGYIC IFJÚSÁGI ÉS GYEREKIRODALMI FOLYÓIRATA* 2023. 07. 03. Paper: <https://mesecentrum.hu/esszektanulmanyok/a-minecraft-mint-virtualis-robinzonad.html> (2023).

„Amikor a határok elmosódnak: Videójáték a krimiben, krimi a videójátékban” In: Daróczi, Jakab; Hajdu, Ildikó; Nyerges, Csaba; Prótár, Noémi (szerk.) *Határok és határátlépések*, Budapest, Magyarország : ELTE Eötvös József Collegium (2022) 316 p. pp. 171-188.

- „Spatiality, Focalization and Temporality in Horror Games”, *Acta Ludologica* 5 : 2 pp. 72-84. , 13 p. (2022). Paper: https://actaludologica.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AL_2022-5-2_Study-5_Jancsovics.pdf.
- „A videójáték mint narratíva” *TISZATÁJ: IRODALMI MŰVÉSZETI ÉS TÁRSADALMI FOLYÓIRAT* 76 : 9 pp. 39-40. , 2 p. (2022).
- „Resident Evil Village CAPCOM: Resident Evil Village (PlayStation 4 version). [digital game]. Osaka : Capcom, 2021.” *Acta Ludologica* 5 : 1 pp. 128-131. , 4 p. (2022). Paper: https://actudologica.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/AL_2022-5-1_Review-2_Jancsovics.pdf.
- „Play the art: Artistic value in video games” *Replay. The Polish Journal of Game Studies* 8 : 1 pp. 27-42. , 16 p. (2022). Paper: <https://czasopisma.uni.lodz.pl/Replay/article/view/13994>.
- „A filmek és videójátékok történetelbeszési technikái” In: Novák, Anikó; Semság, Tibor (szerk.) *Nyom-követés 5. : Tanulmánykötet : A Vajdasági Magyar Doktoranduszok és Kutatók Szervezete és a Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége Irodalomtudományi Osztály IV. közös konferenciájának tanulmánykötete*. Budapest, Magyarország : Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Irodalomtudományi Osztály (2020) 149 p. pp. 81-93. , 13 p.
- „Látni és látva lenni: a videójátékok figyelemirányító stratégiái”, In: Gyimesi, Timea (szerk.) *Figyelem-Projekt : Tanulmányok a figyelemről*. Szeged, Magyarország : Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Francia Tanszék GalPhi Kutatócsoport (2020) 90 p. pp. 73-81. , 9 p.
- „Detektívtörténetek Moretti rendszerében : Alkalmazható-e a távoli olvasás a videójátékokra?” *LITERATURA* 46 : 3 pp. 368-376. , 9 p. (2020). Paper: http://real-j.mtak.hu/14979/13/literatura_2020_3.pdf.
- „Történetjátszás: A döntésalapú számítógépes játékok és az irodalomtudomány” In: Fogarasi, György; Tóth, Ákos (szerk.) *A tudományos hálózatoktól a hálózatok tudományáig (OTDK-tanulmányok)* Szeged, Magyarország : Szegedi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Összehasonlító Irodalomtudományi Tanszék (2019) 345 p. pp. 312-345. , 34 p.
- „A nyelv szerepe a videójátékok világépítésében” *Filológiai Közöny* 2024/1, (2024) [under release].

Other Publications

Editing the „Számptalanok a világ történetei”: videójáték és narrativitás thematic block in *Tiszatáj* journal. 2022. szeptemberi szám. pp. 39-92. , 54 p. (2022).