

Metaleptic experience of literature in *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*

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Abstract

Literary texts appear simultaneously as diegetic and non-diegetic entries in the contemporary video games. That dual role and interactive properties of the medium allow their readers to observe and enact the affiliations between literature, thoughts and objects. The affordances of literary texts are therefore reshaped and reexamined, while metalepsis, the transgression of narrative boundaries, occurs. This article discusses literature as a phenomenon functioning in a complex system disclosed in a digital environment. The analysis of how books are used in the video game *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021) serves to explicate how the metaleptic experience of literature can be achieved through the game medium. Object-oriented ontology, unnatural narratology and ludology provide the methodological framework for the research.

Keywords

metalepsis, video games, object, ludology, narratology

Metaleptyczne doświadczenie literatury w *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut*

Abstrakt

We współczesnych grach wideo teksty literackie pojawiają się jednocześnie jako wpisy diegetyczne i niediegetyczne. Ta podwójna rola i interaktywne właściwości medium pozwalają czytelnikom obserwować i odgrywać powiązania pomiędzy literaturą, myślami i przedmiotami. Afordancje tekstów literackich ulegają zatem przekształceniu i ponownemu zbadaniu, podczas gdy miejsce ma metalepsa, czyli przekroczenie granic narracyjnych. W artykule literatura omówiona jest jako zjawisko funkcjonujące w złożonym systemie ujawniającym się w środowisku cyfrowym. Analiza wykorzystania książek w grze wideo *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021) ma na celu wyjaśnienie, w jaki sposób metaleptyczne doświadczenie literatury można osiągnąć za pośrednictwem gry. Ramy metodologiczne badań tworzą ontologia obiektowa, narratologia nienaturalna i ludologia.

Słowa kluczowe

metalepsa, gry wideo, obiekt, ludologia, narratologia

1. Introduction

Contemporary video game narratives incorporate material from other media to enhance and diversify the player's experience. One instance of such practices is the use of literature in the digital, interactive narrative of the video game *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021). While video games use an abundance of textual material (in the interface, in gameplay tutorials, and in the diegesis – when characters encounter readable material in the storyworld), the use of literary texts in that medium is particularly interesting. They can serve a couple purposes simultaneously. Diegetic textual entries can inform player about the storyworld and gameplay mechanics, retaining their diegetic afordances. Those entries are paratexts for the player and at the

same time they are regular texts for the character. When the character in a video game stumbles upon a literary text with all its traditional properties (a poem or a novel), the nature of the text is altered by the game medium, through which it is approached. The experience of reading a literary text in the video game is therefore different to the experience of reading a literary text outside the game environment. It is the playable character of “the diegetic text” that allows the player to perceive it through an unfamiliar perspective. Examples of how a video game utilizes diegetic literary texts can be found in *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021), a complex narrative that employs metalepsis, defined by Gerard Genette as “deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding” (1988: 88), in its organization of the presented reality to design a highly engaging narrative rhetoric (Phelan 2007) for the player to engage in. This article studies that rhetoric – and the use of literary texts in the digital, playable narrative of *Disco Elysium* – to show the resulting aesthetic, ontological, and interpretive phenomena that depend on the interrelation of what is read and what is played.

2. Reading video games

Video games have eluded strict categorization for quite some time. They are analyzed by ludologists, narratologists, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers alike. This plethora of scholarly interests visualizes of how many units a video game is constructed. Literature is one of those units.

In her influential text on digital storytelling, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), Janet Murray concluded the chapter on immersion stating that “the computer is providing us with a new stage for the creation of participatory theater” (Murray 1997: 125). Video games erase the distance between diegetic and non-diegetic elements, by asking players to make changes in the (digital, virtual, possible) storyworld, thus allowing metalepsis. The player has to learn how it functions as well as learn the game’s rules in order to be immersed and to read in-game texts

effectively. Murray further observed that “the more persuasive the sensory representation of the digital space, the more we feel that we are present in the virtual world and the wider range of actions we will seek to perform there” (1997: 125). The scholar pairs the representation of the game’s world with the player’s desire of agency and alluring visual properties of digital models. Combined, the rules, how they are enacted by the player and visible digital worlds form systems that allow to perceive certain objects in context. Among these objects there are literary artifacts confined in books.

In *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (2007), Ian Bogost argued that “videogames have a unique persuasive power” (2007: ix). In his view, the procedural rhetoric of video games has educational value. Through game’s mechanics one can learn how a world works, and what are the relationships between different elements in a system. Literature can become an element of a virtual world; thus, it operates as a part of a system, while obeying a set of rules. In order to reach it the player has to cognitively organize narrative levels within the system, which in result has to become an unnatural narrative. As Jan Alber points out when recipients “are confronted with unnatural scenarios or events, they are invited to conduct seemingly impossible mapping operations to orient themselves within storyworlds that refuse to be organized exclusively by real-world parameters” (Alber and Richardson 2020: 5). Video games are able to depict the relationship between a medium and a different medium inside it (a literary text in a video game), using solutions impossible in the real world.

The specific kind of video games, that is open world video games, is crucial in the context of this article as they require from players taking particular action which may lead them to the literary texts. In an open-world virtual environment reading a literary text is often a side activity, not exactly demanded to complete the game. Open-world video games focused on the narrative are an example of what Jasper Juul terms “emergence games”. The scholar states that “in the emergence game, the

rules of the game must keep producing new challenges by way of their design” (Juul 2005: 133). The challenges, however, do not have to be mandatory. An open-world video game may offer a challenge to analyze how literary texts function in a specific environment, although, as in the case of *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021), such challenge can be overlooked, while the action of discovering it is a helpful step in comprehending the unnatural narrative structure of this title.

The initial dispute between narratology and ludology, concerning the importance of research of game’s rules versus the research of game’s narrative (Petrowicz 2014), has resulted in a few approaches that attempt to reconcile the two disciplines. Marcin Petrowicz exemplifies that “Ian Bogost, although he is not a direct continuator of neither the ludological or narrativist tradition, combines the demands of both environments in his work” (2014: 83). Bogost’s unit operations and procedural rhetoric offer various scholars an opportunity to study the structure of video games, and the functionality of their complex systems. In the recent article that appeared in *Games and Culture* journal, Atėnė Mendelytė adopts Bogost’s concept to evaluate the video game *Alan Wake 2* (2023) from the philosophical perspective, addressing its literary premises as well. Mendelytė compares particular units of the game pointing out the significant role of literary texts in *Alan Wake 2*’s system. She pinpoints “paraliterature, that is, paranormal literature that has reality-altering effects (functions as a hyper-chaotic attractor)” (2024: 10), and a character’s response (“A poem or a riddle?”) to a nursery rhyme puzzle that “perfectly encapsulates the game’s procedure of questioning categorical distinctions; the aesthetic is posited as the ludic” (Mendelytė 2024: 11). Through the game medium literary units are noticed in an alive, responding environment, where they can perform functions different than regular literary artifacts. Approaching them in the digital medium, however, requires a mental, metaleptic activity and the apt gameplay mechanics, what is a central point of this essay, as metalepsis can be considered unnatural (Bell and Alber 2012).

Furthermore, in a video game an avatar becomes a metaleptic embodiment of the player, allowing one to experience a digital world (Ensslin 2023). In order to reach a literary layer of a ludic experience the player actively participates in a transgression of narrative boundaries.

The presence of and interactions with literary texts in a digital world evoke in the player's mind the representation of imaginary worlds. Nevertheless, they remain encompassed in the physical objects, that is in a book, on a piece of paper or in a machine. Marie-Laure Ryan and Tang Weisheng, inspired by computer science and Graham Harman, entitled their recent book *Object-Oriented Narratology* (2024). They open the first chapter by asking the following two questions: "The first is a matter of discourse: how are objects represented, that is, integrated in the storyworld? The second probes their role in the story: how do objects affect the unfolding of the events that make up the *fabula*? Answers to the first issue are highly medium specific" (Ryan and Weisheng 2024: 31). In context of this essay and metalepsis one might add another question: How the properties of an object relate to its non-corporeal contents?

In the video game, literature is a secondary medium, which functions as a text within a text. Therefore, it is experienced through a metaleptic mechanism, which defies the conventional sense-making of the narrative (Hanebeck 2017). Ludologist Antonio José Planells de la Maza makes use of Genette's concept in the following manner:

The Metaleptic Dimension replaces the idea of interactivity by proposing the narratological concept of metalepsis as the connection between the fictional world and the external user who is provided with certain mechanisms to participate in it. Thus, this perspective studies the physical and symbolic systems between the player and the world and vice versa, the internal leaps between different fictional levels and the sporadic and extraordinary disruptions to fictional boundaries that some characters may undergo. (2017: 7)

He notices the complexity of video games' unit operations. As such a unit literature in a video game constitutes instances of an essentially metaleptic experience, that allows "the transgression of the boundaries of the fictional world" (Kukkonen 2011: 4). Studying metalepsis provides a framework for the connections and affiliations of objects and literature in question. As Astrid Ensslin has observed a specific form of digital gameplay "happens when we interact with digital artifacts that combine so-called ludic (from Latin *ludus*: game or play) and literary (from Latin *littera*: alphabetic letter, or plural *litterae*: piece of writing) elements" (2014: 1). The subsequent analysis takes into consideration both, ludic and literary, emphasizing metalepsis as a crucial factor of such system's functionality.

3. *Disco Elysium*

Disco Elysium: The Final Cut (2021) is a role-playing video game, based on a tabletop RPG (role-playing game) system developed by Robert Kurvitz. The genre of the game is difficult to categorize as it combines realist and fantastical aesthetics. The storyworld of *Disco Elysium*, although is extremely detailed and outlined in terms of its inventory, appears as a delusion of a melancholic alcoholic. The player traverses it as a detective with amnesia, Harry Du Bois, controlling the avatar from the isometric perspective. The game's narrative is set in the city of Revachol, in the district of Martinaire, and it concerns a murder mystery. Gameplay mechanics mostly rely on choosing dialogue options, developing into forking narrative paths. Human characters are, however, not the only speaking entities. In *Disco Elysium* inanimate objects, such as a mailbox, a statue, clothes, or even a dead body become vocal. Furthermore, particular abilities of the playable character such as physical strength have their own agenda and comment certain situations as well, thus influencing the dialogue choice and adhering to the structure of unnatural narrative, which by definition may invite "recipients to create cognitive frames or scripts that transcend their real-world

knowledge (such as that of the talking breast, the dead character, the retrogressive temporality, or the shapeshifting house)” (Alber and Richardson 2020: 5).

Julialicia Case observes that “the in-game skill sheet and dice-rolling mechanics are constant reminders of all of the other ways that Harry might engage with the world and its difficulties. Choice in this case does not affect the linearity of the story as much as it draws awareness to the different ways there are of engaging with it” (2018: 79). The mentioned mechanics organize the resulting immersion in literary artifacts. Upon reading a book, Harry is interrupted by his own abilities, depending on which one is developed enough. Further, the book as a physical object may address its reader directly, while in-game time flows solely when the text appears on the screen, when Harry participates in an exchange of words. Michał Kłosiński explicates that in *Disco Elysium* “the flow of time is correlated with the length and intensity of the text presented in the form of dialogue between our protagonist and things, senses, mental abilities, feelings” (2021: 58).

Books have two functions. They are inanimate objects, whose shape, smell and texture can be assessed; simultaneously, the stories they contain are essentially immaterial. Their appearance as well as content produce dialogue options, and thus books seem to be used to effectively pass the time. Kłosiński continues that “Harry’s intentional acts turn into a soliloquy, a staging of internal dialogue or monologue” (2021: 59). A variety of objects maintain a significant role in the game, as they are encompassed with meaning: “the game stages objects as kernels of speech and participants in dialogue, therefore giving them a place in what might be called a great dialogue of beings” (Kłosiński 2021: 61). Objects therefore are more than props that exist only upon interaction with an actant (the player). They are powerful projectors of meaning; they have something to say. For instance, “the mailbox is an object with past, bearing marks of harassment, insults and aggression” (Kłosiński 2021: 61).

There are ten diegetic books in *Disco Elysium* – objects that Harry can find around Martinaise and interact with. *A Brief Look at Infra-Materialism* and *From A to Zriek! A Guide to Cockatoos* are two titles that are necessary to complete two side quests, *Get yourself organized* and *Find your heraldic bird*. The remaining eight books, *A Primer for Small Kids*, *Book La Fumée, Vol. 1 No. 4*, *Dick Mullen and the Mistaken Identity*, *The Greatest Innocence*, *Hjelmdallermann: The Man from Hjelmdall*, *The Man from Hjelmdall and the Devil Woman*, *Medicinal Purposes of the Pale*, and *Sixteen Days in Coldest April*, are used to pass the time, however some of them influence dialogue options with NPCs (non-playable characters) and affect Harry's health and morale.

A Brief Look at Infra-Materialism is received from Steban, the Student Communist. It is a part of the quest which had been removed from the original game, but was later brought back in *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021). The quest *Get yourself organized* is one of the Political vision quests, which allow the player to choose Harry's political alignment. *A Brief Look at Infra-Materialism* is thus a political theory book which concerns communism. Prior to interacting with it, when it is placed in the inventory, it is described as follows: "A concise introduction to infra-materialist theory, intended for a general audience. You can tell this particular copy has spent a lot of time in someone's back pocket" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). The small icon representing the book is only illustrative, as its visual properties are described by the text appearing on the right, "enclosed by the frame of the film tape. Sequences staging objects as partners in dialogue are thus already an allegory of the cinema grammar (Galloway 2006: 106), their initiation designates the moments of cut and action proper to the film narration" (Kłosiński 2021: 60). Furthermore, film-like narration is presented in a deep voice, coming from Harry's mind. The color of the book's cover is disclosed, while the mind's reaction to it results in gaining experience points but also in losing morale, when an ability called *Inland Empire* compares the color to apricots. The player's focus is relocated to Harry and the world around him,

however upon reading a diegetic book it is pulled vertically deeper to another fictional level, thus metalepsis takes place. In the case of *A Brief Look at Infra-Materialism* that subsequent level regards the history of communism in this storyworld. Contemporary video game players “no longer consider metalepsis the exception, but rather a structural and inspirational element of the medium itself” (Planells de la Maza 2017: 170). Through the naturalized metalepsis the player reads diegetic books two-fold, as the player and as the character. Hence studying the communist concepts affects both. Reading *A Brief Look at Infra-Materialism* the player engages in the forking hypertext, contemplating the ideas it discusses, while Harry’s opinions on the matter are encompassed in the text itself. The actions that occur during the reading are described in second person narration, as in a tabletop RPG: “You turn to the table of contents” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). The narration is directed to the player and Harry simultaneously. The deep voice accompanied by text stimulates the player to create a mental image of an action which the video game does not show. The same voice narrates Harry’s textual actual world and the books he reads. Through that storytelling practice the distance between the fictional worlds is shortened and ultimately erased. As Harry progresses through the infra-materialist theory and its history his mind is constantly active. When a revolutionary is mentioned Harry’s ability, Half Light, interrupts: “He is your brother, a fellow *doom prophet*” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). The terms, events and characters, who appear in the book become personal for Harry whose emotions get involved in the story. The concepts of political theory speak to Harry through the object, that is the book, and through Harry’s mind engaged by the questions posed by the text. Harry’s thoughts and the propositions of the book participate in the exchange of information:

At this second level, certain hyper-revolutionary individuals may even develop the ability to extend their thoughts into material space and vice versa. YOU – Wait, does that mean communists

can *read minds*? A BRIEF LOOK AT INFRA-MATERIALISM – According to infra-materialist theory, yes! Under suitably revolutionary conditions, that is... (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021).

The bizarre suggestions are proposed in a compelling, hypertextual fashion that leads to a specific conclusion. The player can choose whether Harry is doubtful towards the general idea of the book, gets enthusiastic about it, or simply stops reading. Another skill, Encyclopedia, speaks up and adds context to the provided historical account. Eventually, when Harry decides to finish the inner dialogue with the book, he sums it up: “YOU – Plausible or not, there’s something beautiful about this idea. Is there any more? A BRIEF LOOK AT INFRA-MATERIALISM – There is no more. You’ve reached the outer theoretical limits of communism, and in less than 200 pages” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Completing the book on communist theory means simply getting through its pages, however those as objects, as well as the reader’s independent mind participate in blurring of extra and intra diegetic layers of the fictional world.

One of the books that can be acquired from the bookstore in Martinaise is *From A to Zriek! A Guide to Cockatoos*. Its description in the inventory states the following: “A book about different cockatoo species and their behavioral problems. Perhaps it could also offer some insight into your own often problematic actions? The spectacular Major Majestic cockatoo eyes you from the cover” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Engaging in this book is a side activity, although it is still a developed and complex one. Bettina Bodi and Jan-Noël Thon claim that “while *Disco Elysium*’s skill management system is closely connected to its nonlinear narrative structure, it is worth noting that the resulting choices are still best described as affording narrative rather than dramatic agency to the player” (2020: 174). Traversing through a diegetic text is thus a journey through scripted narrative forking paths. Even *From A to Zriek! A Guide to Cockatoos*, a book about birds, is woven with narrative options consisting of object’s influence, character’s

interrupting thoughts and skills, and player's decisions. The kinds of cockatoos are thoroughly discussed, while reading the book results in a new dialogue option, as Harry can choose which cockatoo he is: "FROM A TO ZRIEEK! A GUIDE TO COCK-ATOOS – Yes, but all those cockatoo species are so different! Which one are you?" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Notions from the book transcend its textual form and are transferred and imposed onto its reader's consciousness, while the video game discloses this process as an inductor of metaleptic experience. An interweaving of storyworlds is enacted whenever the character interacts with books.

Primer for Small Kids can be found after passing a perception test. Correspondingly to experiencing other books in-game, upon its inspection Harry's mind makes a comment: "PRIMER BOOK – Mhm. This book will show you the score, get you oriented with those basic concepts you appear to be hazy on. The anthropomorphic bear will give you the *low down* of your life..." (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). The book is intended to teach its reader the alphabet. In its ironic manner the video game underlines the importance of letters as basic units of text. Like in *Alan Wake 2*, letters and then words become "an object of power" (Mendelytė 2024: 13).

La Fumée, Vol. 1 No. 4 is another diegetic entry focused on communism. The narrator tells its contents to Harry and the player, while various Harry's skills interrupt, and alter the reading process. Furthermore, the metaleptic experience of the book in this case includes in its system additional instance that is an NPC that follows Harry, his partner, Kim Kitsuragi: "YOU – (whisper) 'Kim! I think this is a *communist* magazine.' KIM KITSURAGI – 'What do you expect? It was laying around the office of the Débardeurs' Union. They're probably *bankrolling* the thing'" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Kim's skeptical comment becomes a part of the reading, as it concerns the book's content. Discussing it with him while conceptualizing the communist ideology provides a wider context: "YOU – I wonder what *else* is really just a metaphor for life under capitalism"

KIM KITSURAGI – ‘I’m sure most things are, if the young men who wrote this article are to be believed’ (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021).

Dick Mullen and the Mistaken Identity, *Hjelmdallermann: The Man from Hjelmdall*, and *The Man from Hjelmdall and the Devil Woman*, are the three texts that are literary fictions. The first title is a detective fiction. When the book is interacted with its sensory properties are highlighted: “The brittle paperback feels fragile to the touch” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). The physical form of the object already discloses its non-corporal messaging. Detective fictions or pulp fictions are associated with cheap, paperback editions, passed from hand to hand. As Robin W. Winks observed “detective fiction is central to most debates concerning the legitimacy of the study of ‘popular culture,’ since it combines the traditional scholar’s normal form of source material - the printed book - with that which traditional scholars often have disliked most, formula fiction written primarily for sales” (1980: 3). *Dick Mullen and the Mistaken Identity*’s wear and tear tells its own story, although simultaneously it functions as a connection in metaleptic experience of the book. Harry’s ability, *Esprit de Corps*, comments the behavior of Dick Mullen who passes out drunk: “ESPRIT DE CORPS [medium success] – An extremely unprofessional and *hurtful* stereotype that’s offensive to all upstanding officers of the law” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). As Harry gets engaged in the textual possible world, the recentered player follows. Dick Mullen’s world through imagination gains shape as a mental construct. In order to travel through it the reader holds on to the plot. Britta Martens explicates that

the classic detective formula consists of two contiguous stories: that of the crime and that of the investigation. The reader follows the narrative of the story of investigation, in which the detective tries to discover the story of the crime from clues, until the detective is finally able to reconstruct it in its entirety up to its

endpoint, the crime, which also marks the start of the story of the investigation. (2011: 201)

Dick Mullen and the Mistaken Identity repeats that pattern, however functioning in the video game system, which allows naturalized metalepsis, modifies it into an anti-detective story. Furthermore, it employs particular objects to do so. Approaching the end of the Dick Mullen's investigation the reader is reminded of the book's properties: "But then what does this book know? It's just a poorly made piece of pulp garbage, made to be consumed and discarded" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Undermining the coherence of the narrative the narration that comes from the reader's mind breaks the immersion. Ultimately, Harry and the player are asked to decide who committed murder, however the solution of the mystery is obscured: "You're turning pages so fast you don't even notice the ancient spine coming unglued..." (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). When the book as an object is reconfigured, the world it contains is restructured and crumbles, and thus the dynamic between the reader and the text changes. The desired resolution of the investigation is replaced by bitter disappointment. This outcome resonates with the theme of *Disco Elysium* itself.

Hjelmdallermann: The Man from Hjelmdall, and its sequel *The Man from Hjelmdall and the Devil Woman* are pulp fictions, that emphasize masculine tropes. Sadek Kessous establishes that in *Disco Elysium* "reading the novel conveys the game's broader understanding of readerly acts. It involves the kind of disruptive interior conversations that characterize both the game and gamerly reading more generally, making a virtue of its scattered quality to unsettle ostensible meanings and emphasize the diverse effects of texts" (2024: 6). In that manner the reader may approach ambivalent issues of the text uniquely. As Harry's skill, Conceptualization, comments "this book makes a mockery of the very idea of good plotting, though something tells you coherence was never the point" (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). Kessous continues that "the pleasure the game

offers emerges from how it renders reading a form of open-ended play” (2024: 7). The reading of an in-game book occurs between six interlocutors: character’s senses, character’s mind, objects, the world, the player’s senses and the player’s mind.

The Greatest Innocence and *Sixteen Days in Coldest April* are two texts that regard the history of *Disco Elysium*’s storyworld. The first is a classic history book. Interaction with it leads to a pop-quiz, in which Harry and the player can test their close reading abilities. Through that the possibility of constituting a cohesive background of a world is ascribed to an ephemeral reading technique. *Sixteen Days in Coldest April*’s inventory entry states that its “cover features a row of concrete buildings with a monochrome rainbow in the sky. It tells a rather excruciating story about two lovers during a period of ethnic unrest in Yugo-Graad. The book has been filed under psychological realism” (*Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* 2021). It is a text more immersive than *The Greatest Innocence* as it employs literary techniques to familiarize its readers with the characters. Hence, when Harry encounters a particularly depressing fragment he loses a point of morale and a point of health. The metaleptic connections function both ways. The reader is drawn deeper into a fictional world, while, in the unnatural fashion, the fiction has palpable influence on the reader’s well-being.

Medicinal Purposes of the Pale refers to the “the reality-bending substance” (Bodi and Thon 2020: 166), which is the pale. It exists beyond perception, although it is real, meaning it connects specific places of this storyworld. The concept itself is unnatural, elusive and so is the book about its medicinal purposes. Thus the feeling induced by the reading merges with the feeling evoked by exploring Martinaire and conversing with its inhabitants and objects.

The variety of literary texts that the player might encounter and interact with in Martinaire forces metalepsis to become a phenomenon familiar to the player, a compelling relocation mechanism. That allows a fluent reading of the unnatural narrative, in which physical objects and immaterial worlds blend

and exchange their properties. All in all the analysis of diegetic texts in *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021) discloses an intricate playing system in which reading performs a definitive function.

4. Conclusions

Astrid Ensslin claimed in 2014 that “the body of texts that fall under literary gaming is growing rapidly and becoming increasingly diverse. It now ranges from literary texts driven mostly by cognitive and ergodic ludicity to literary games proper, which exhibit various forms of ludic mechanics” (2014: 161). *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021) took some literary texts in their original form and placed them within a complex ludic system, that allows the player to experience literature metaleptically, that is, through an interweaving of storyworlds. According to Julia Alicia Case in “*Disco Elysium*, the simultaneous narratives encourage players to see themselves and their stories as a part of a larger meta-narrative composed of a variety of incongruous experiences” (2018: 80). Literature in a digital environment is mediated and involves extratextual factors in the reading process. As I have noted above approaching it requires six interlocutors: character’s senses, character’s mind, objects, the world, the player’s senses and the player’s mind. The ten analyzed in-game books make use of each of those elements in order to engage and influence their reader. System of such an unnatural narrative is comprehensible due to the player’s acquaintance with the workings of metalepsis. Reading books in video games proves to be metalepsis. To conclude, in the case of *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (2021), to read means to engage in the dialogue between thoughts and objects. Video games offer a virtual space to stage and role-play the affiliations between the two phenomena, therefore appears a possibility to view and analyze literary texts as constituents of a broader cognitive comprehension system.

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