PLAYING ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

How do narrative, game mechanics and violence intersect in the video games *Spec Ops: The Line* and *This War of Mine* to create meaningful aesthetic experiences?

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Year 4
BA Liberal Arts and Sciences
(International Relations)

Independent Research Project
(20 credits)

Supervisor: Dr. Gregory Salter
How did I get here?

My background:

- International Relations (major)
- Music
- English Literature
- Game Studies
How did I get here?

The ludology/narratology debate
The interdisciplinary approach

Eliminating the binary between games and other art forms

- It’s incorrect
- Limits what we can learn about games
  eg. How they borrow from/develop other art forms
Dissertation aims

To demonstrate that video games should be studied using an interdisciplinary approach

To use my background to bring a fresh perspective to the study of video games

To help legitimise video games as an art form
The interdisciplinary approach in practice

11 bit Studios (2014)
The interdisciplinary approach in practice

Game Studies

Procedural Rhetoric (Bogost, 2007)
Ludonarrative Dissonance (Hocking, 2007)
Game Emotions (Rusch, 2009)

Literature

Unreliable narrator (Booth, 1961)
Function of storylines (Singer, 2004)
Death of the author (Barthes, 1967)

History of Art

Aboutness (Danto, 1974)
Post-1960s performance art (Fluxus group, John Beuy)
Abjection (Kristeva, 1941)
The interdisciplinary approach in practice

Game Emotions (Rusch, 2009)

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‘Abjection’ (Kristeva, 1941)

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Combined, can explain why the experience of *This War of Mine* is so powerful for players
The interdisciplinary approach in practice

Recommended

0.0 hrs last two weeks / 17.1 hrs on record

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Entered a building with other people.
The building’s description had said “Danger” which meant hostiles. Bandits.
I grabbed my knife and was ready for those bandits.
I saw one bandit and after breaking in through a window, she ran calling for backup.
One guy showed up with a shotgun and chased me off but I waited.
He searched, and couldn’t find me and then I got the drop on him.
We fought, he couldn’t shoot, and three stabs later he fell.
I grabbed the shotgun and went inside.
My friends needed food, and these bandits were killers. They deserved what they got.
I grabbed food, supplies, and another bandit showed up!
I fired at them with the shotgun, and they dropped with a gurgling scream.
One bandit ran after me! Surely they had a knife!
No… she ran past me to the man’s corpse.
She was crying. She called me a murderer.
I fired again and she dropped.
There was silence then, and I had to hurry up and grab the rest of the supplies before more bandits showed up.
I opened a closet, and snagged the food.
But, the inventory of the closet said “Private”
Someone owned this wardrobe?
I looked outside toward the other building, and between the two… a garden someone built?
One guy had mentioned they were running low on meds.
This… no, it couldn’t be. It just couldn’t be!
This wasn’t… this wasn’t an abandoned building being picked clean.
This was another group’s safehouse.
These people were… were… survivors!
…and I was the bandit.
The benefits of an interdisciplinary approach

Allowed me to construct unique, new arguments

I could draw on knowledge from across my degree

Appropriate for the art form being analysed
Thank you for listening
References


11 bit studios (2014) This War of Mine, video game. Warsaw, Poland: 11 bit studios.


