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**ASSESSMENT 2: VIDEO ANALYSIS &
ACADEMIC REFERENCE LIST**

GD3600 - FILM AND VIDEO GAMES MAJOR PROJECT

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ERGODIC CRITICISM PROJECT:

CRITICAL REFLECTION

In this project, I aimed to explore a new trajectory within the field of video game criticism, by incorporating additional elements such as interactivity, non-linearity, and fail-states in order to better align with the medium-specific qualities of video games. The project begins with a brief introduction to the concept of ergodicity, the objective of the project, as well as its rules/structure. This is done in an attempt to create a permeable space that provides the opportunity for the participant to position themselves as both critical observer and configurative player. Allowing them to apply their own configuration meaning to a pre-defined linear text.

This work is inspired and grounded in the works of Keathley, and Corrigan in relation to film theory and Aarseth, Galloway, Juul, and Salen & Zimmerman, in their understanding of video game-specific qualities.

STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

Initially, the participant is shown a modified extract from Journey (Thatgamecompany, 2012) which is used later on in the project. This is followed by an overview of the essay film/video essay and its history, drawing on the three distinct examples for this work. The project continues to identify the potential benefits of video essays in their application to video game criticism, with practical examples included. Additionally, this forms the bases for the project's main argument to create a medium-specific form of criticism for video games similar to the essay film and film criticism. Throughout the project, the participant is able to create their own path through links, allowing them to configure the text to some degree. Based on their selection, points are allocated which in turn relate to their progression towards the Labyrinth's exit.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

From a technical standpoint, I made use of a variety of source materials in order to keep the participant engaged through potentially multiple 'playthroughs' as well as allowing for multiple points of interest. This was also decided as it allowed for some de-lineation in terms of the structure of the project (*see fig. 1*) Elements like the timer, rules, interactive links, ludic narrative, and fail-states were included in an attempt to emulate game-specific qualities (*see fig. 2*). Specifically, drawing from Aarseth's definition of ergodic literature (1997, p.1) in order to transform the non-ergodic literary form of the video essay to better reflect the concept of ergodic criticism.

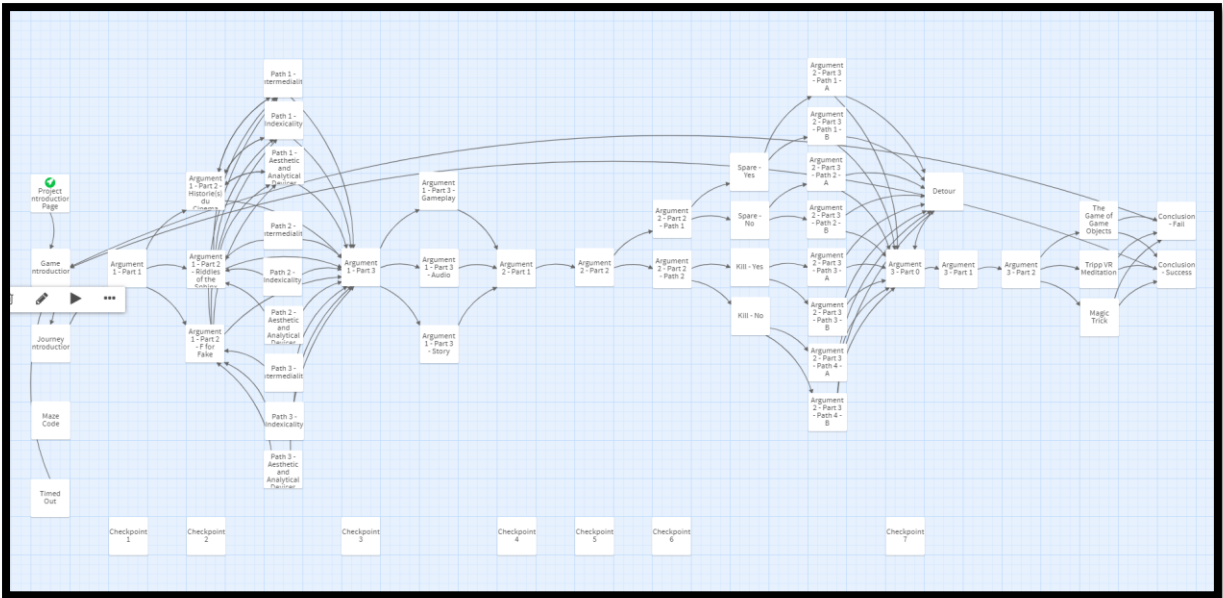


Figure 1: Structure of the project in the Twine engine

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• (set: Scounter to 270)
• |amount>[Scounter] seconds remaining!({live: 1s})[(set: Scounter to it - 1)
• (if: Scounter is 0)][(go-to: "Timed Out")](replace: ?amount)[Scounter]
• ]
• "What will you to in order to progress?"
• ---
• |=
• [[Spare Toriel->Argument 2 - Part 2 - Path 1]]
• (link: "Spare Toriel")[\
• (set: SProgress to it + 1)\
• (go-to: "Argument 2 - Part 2 - Path 1")\
• ]
• |=
• [[Kill Toriel->Argument 2 - Part 2 - Path 2]]
• (link: "Kill Toriel")[\
• (set: SProgress to it + 1)\
• (go-to: "Argument 2 - Part 2 - Path 2")\
• ]
• |==
• ---
• (live: 1s)[
• (if:SProgress is 1)
• [
• 
• ]
• (else-if: SProgress is 2)
• [
• 
• ]
• (else-if: SProgress is 3)
• [
• 
• ]
• (else-if: SProgress is 4)
• [
• 
• ]
• (else-if: SProgress is 5)

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Figure 2: Example of reactive component implementation in the project

VIDEO STRUCTURE

As mentioned, the project includes a variety of source materials. In order to better align with the concepts included in this project, this source material was edited extensively. While this was not ideal, extensive measures were taken to ensure that the fundamental meaning of each was not changed. In the case of the three essay films included early on in the project – *F for Fake* (Welles, O. 1973), *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Mulvey, L & Wollen, P, 1977), and *Historie(s) du Cinéma* (Godard, J-L. 1988) - the editing included for each emulates the source material as much as possible, while also allowing for its essential meaning to be conveyed in a short amount of time.

Two forms of gameplay footage were included in this project. The first; the videos relating to the game *Undertale* (Toby Fox, 2015), were designed in such a way that they called for interaction from the participant through a mimetic interface. The second; is the initial video relating to the game *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) which was designed in such a way that it represented a middle ground between the essay film/video essay and the emulation videos in the first form. Specifically, the video relating to *Journey* is inspired by the film *Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (Ruiz, R, 1978) where the audience must unravel the film's mystery.

From a creative standpoint, I believe the structure of the project does work with its inclusion of a pseudo-game world and game master. The inclusion of the unicursal 'labyrinth' in both the structure of the project as well as the narrative, is inspired by Aarseth's exploration of non-linear forms of text. (1997, pp. 5-9). While the 'voice' of the labyrinth master does attempt to remain consistent throughout (in that it fits within the world of the game), there are moments where the immersion of the game world is broken when discussing the subject matter.

In terms of the overall effectiveness of this project, I believe it does convey its essential meaning effectively and may provide the foundation for additional projects going forward. In addition to this, three other potential trajectories within ergodic criticism were highlighted. I believe that these three trajectories each include varying levels of linearity, interactivity, agency, and effectiveness. In particular, what may separate this project from Juul's *Game of Video Game Objects* (2021), and Tripp's *Tripp VR Meditation* (2021), is not only its additional requirement for input and effort from the player (Aarseth, E. pp. 1-2) but the potential for the participant to fail.

In conclusion, this project is effective in conveying this idea of ergodic criticism and grounds itself within both film and video game theory. The project aims to highlight both the benefits and shortcomings of video essays for video game criticism and how this may be addressed through the inclusion of ergodicity. The project does not dismiss the use of video essays as standalone devices for video game criticism and instead highlights their practical application in this new form of criticism by incorporating them throughout this project. While it is important to consider varying levels of criticism within any field of study, a form of criticism for video games that more closely resembles the action-based nature of the medium may prove more effective.

In future endeavours, I would like to delineate the text further. This may be achieved by constructing other forms of text such as written and video in a more modular fashion, allowing them to be experienced in any order while still retaining their meaning within the whole. This project also allows for reflection on video game criticism as a whole and hopes to provide a platform from which additional research may be explored.

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