



Narrative and Interactivity

Image source: [Alex Shuper](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Aims

- 1 Understand narrative and interactivity in games
- 2 Analyse storytelling, choice and player authorship
- 3 Explain the narratology vs ludology debate
- 4 Apply theory to games

What is Narrative in Games?



Narratology vs. Ludology



Narratology: Games as stories

Ludology: Games as systems

Not a binary: Games combine both

Image source: [Art Rachen](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Story, Choice, and Player Authorship

Player choices matter

Multiple outcomes

Player as co-author



Disco Elysium game still image source: [Disco Elysium](#)

Disco Elysium. 2019. ZA/UM. ZA/UM.

Ryan: Narrative and Interactivity

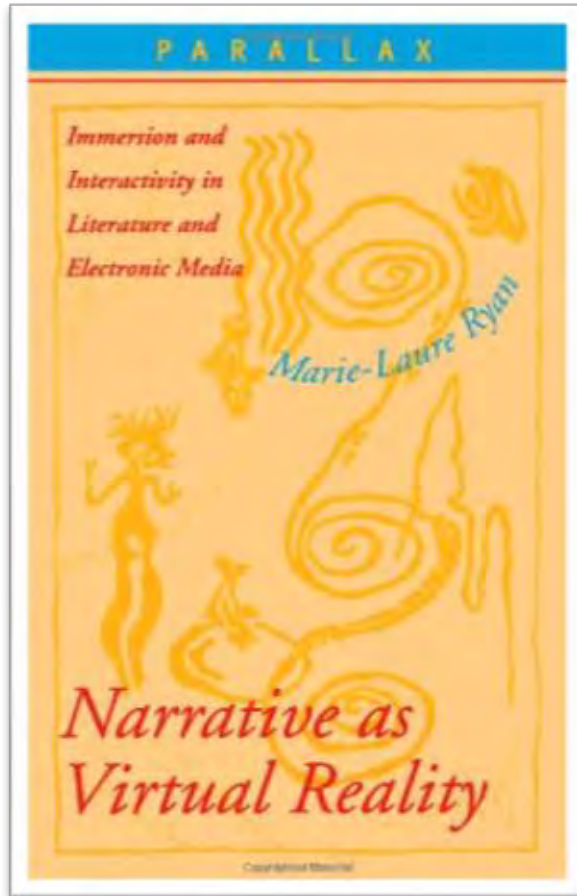


Image source: [Marie-Laure Ryan](#)

Player choices create **branching narrative paths**

Key story events remain **authored and structured**

Player freedom is **guided and constrained by design**

Narrative emerges through a balance of **choice and control**

Example: The Witcher 3

- Choices affect relationships and outcomes
- But major events are still pre-determined

RYAN, Marie-Laure. 2001. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, series Parallax.



Jenkins: Narrative Architecture

Narrative is communicated through **environment and spatial design**

Players **discover story through exploration**

Meaning is conveyed through **objects, environments, and layout**

Story is **embedded in the world**, not only told through dialogue

Example: Dark Souls

- Lore is revealed through environments and item descriptions
- Players piece together the story through exploration



Image source: [Electronic Book Review](#)

JENKINS, Henry. 2004. 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture'.



Emergent Narrative

Not fully scripted

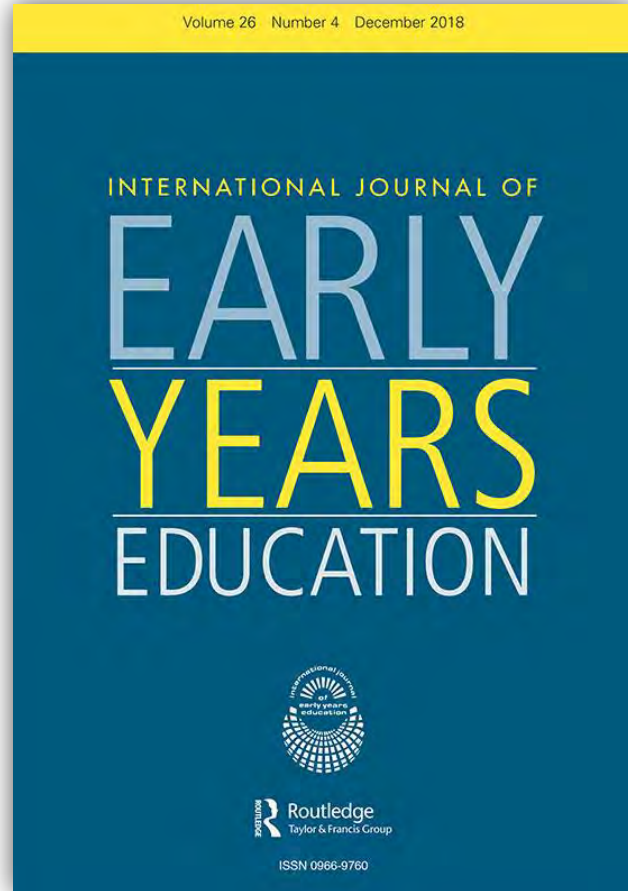
Emerges through play

Player-driven

Image source: [note thanun](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Murray: Agency and Immersion



Agency = the feeling that player actions matter

Players actively shape outcomes, not just observe them

Interaction creates immersion and engagement

Narrative is experienced through participation

Example: Mass Effect

- Player choices affect relationships and story outcomes
- Choices shape both events and character identity

Image source: [Taylor & Francis](https://www.tandfonline.com)

MURRAY, Jane. 2018. 'The play's the thing'. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. 26 (4)



Comparing Narrative Approaches in Games

Theory	Focus	How Narrative Works	Game Example	Key Insight
Ryan	Interactivity vs structure	Player choices shape outcomes, but within authored limits	The Witcher 3	Choice is meaningful but constrained
Jenkins	Spatial storytelling	Story is embedded in environment and discovered through exploration	Dark Souls	Narrative is built into world design
Murray	Agency and participation	Player actions directly influence events and character identity	Mass Effect	Players feel their choices matter

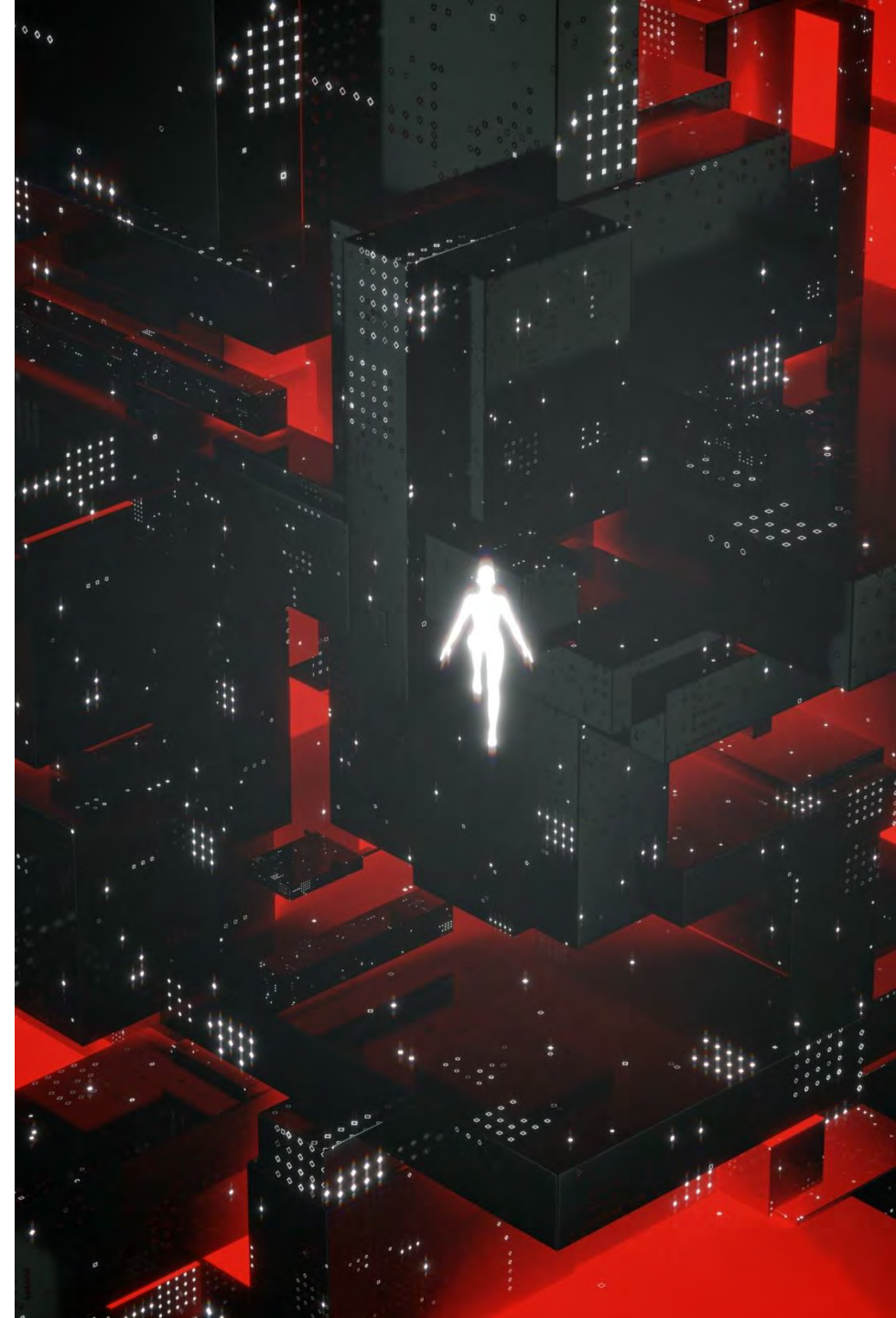
Narrative and Player Identity

Player shapes character

Role construction

Identity through choice

Image source: [Zack Walker](#) on [Unsplash](#)





Applying Narrative Frameworks

What choices exist?

How is story delivered?

What role does the player have?

How is identity constructed?

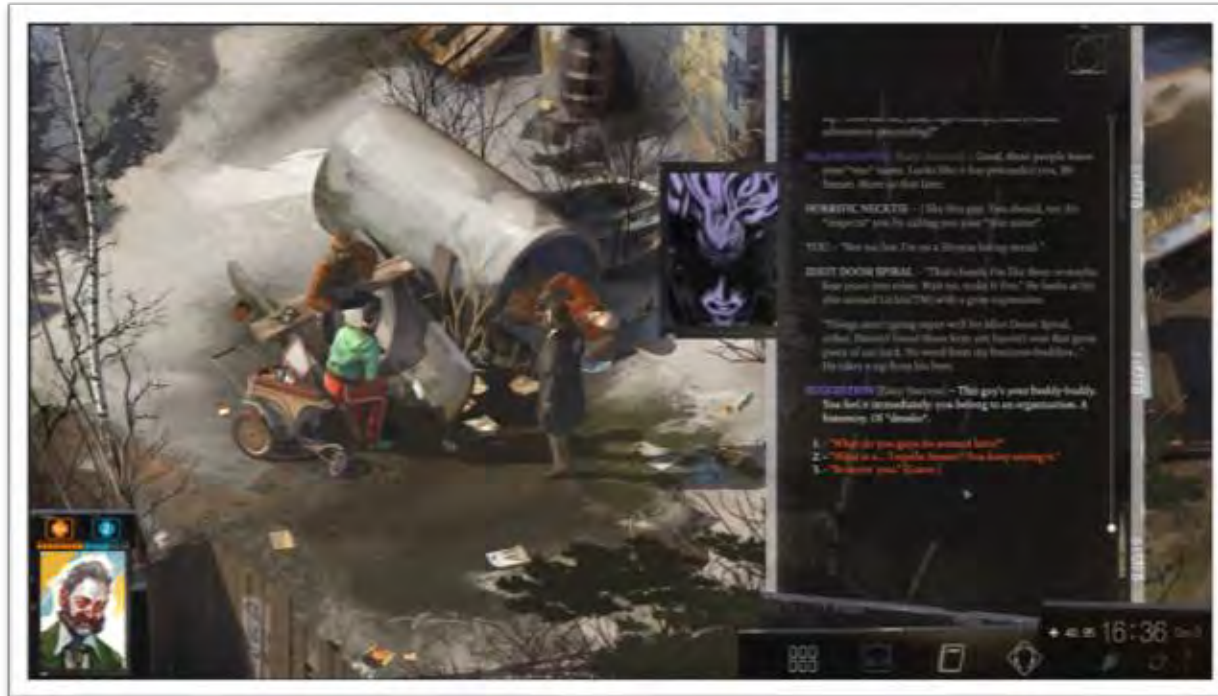
How do systems challenge or extend narrative?

Photo by [UX Indonesia](#) on [Unsplash](#)





Game Example: Disco Elysium



Disco Elysium game still image source: [Disco Elysium](#)

Disco Elysium. 2019. ZA/UM. ZA/UM.

Dialogue driven narrative

Player-defined identity

System + narrative integration

Environmental storytelling (Jenkins)

Systems shape dialogue and outcomes

From Experience to Narrative Meaning

Experience shapes story

Interaction produces meaning

Player action creates narrative



Disco Elysium game still image source: [Disco Elysium](https://discoelysium.com/)

Disco Elysium. 2019. ZA/UM. ZA/UM.



Reflection



When does a game feel like a story?

When does it feel like a system?

How do choices shape meaning?

How do mechanics and systems shape narrative?



Key Takeaways

- 1 Interactive narrative creates tension (Ryan)
- 2 Stories are structured through space and design (Jenkins)
- 3 Agency gives players meaningful control (Murray)
- 4 Players construct identity through choice (Murray / Ryan)
- 5 Meaning emerges from both systems and narrative (Narratology vs Ludology)



Disco Elysium cover art image source:
[Wikipedia](#)

Disco Elysium. 2019. ZA/UM. ZA/UM.

Weekly PBL Activity: Disco Elysium – Are Games Just Interactive Novels?

Problem:

A journalist claims *Disco Elysium* proves games are “just interactive novels.”

Write a **250-word critical response** in your Journal and construct a **rebuttal** using:

- **Narratology** (story, dialogue, character)
- **Ludology** (systems, mechanics, interaction)

Do:

- Use **one concrete example** from play
- Show how **player interaction** shapes narrative
- Explain how **systems produce meaning**