

Applying Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium Theory to the Non-Linear Structure of Disco Elysium

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Article Details:

Received: 25 June 2026

Revised: 12 July 2026

Accepted: 20 July 2026

Published: 31 July 2026

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Recommended Citation:

Dela Fuente, G. T., Revilla, N. M. (2026). Applying Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium Theory to the Non-Linear Structure of Disco Elysium. *The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research*. 1 (9), 379-393.

<https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.694>

Index Terms:

narrative equilibrium theory, non-linear narrative, interactive fiction, player agency, disco Elysium, structuralist narratology

Abstract. This thesis explores the relevance of Tzvetan Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium theory, which includes the phases of equilibrium, disruption, recognition, restored order, and new equilibrium, in relation to the non-linear, player-driven format of the interactive fiction video game *Disco Elysium* (ZA/UM, 2019). Utilizing a qualitative narrative analysis based on structuralist theory, the research examines how the game's fragmented storytelling, branching dialogue trees, Thought Cabinet mechanic, and probabilistic skill checks not only mirror but also challenge Todorov's traditional model. Research shows that although all five stages can still be recognized, they are significantly altered: equilibrium is now viewed as a "post-equilibrium" that demands player reimagining, disruption occurs at various simultaneous levels (external, internal, societal), recognition is spread out across numerous possible realizations instead of being confined to a single moment, and both restored order and new equilibrium arise as conditional outcomes determined by the players rather than being established fixed narrative conclusions. The analysis clearly shows that player agency significantly impacts the structural integrity of Todorov's model within interactive environments. In contrast to traditional linear narratives where stages are presented in a sequence determined by the author, *Disco Elysium* distributes narrative control through player decisions, skill results, and internalized thoughts, making the shift from disruption to equilibrium an outcome of gameplay that arises organically rather than following a set course. The study concludes that while Todorov's framework is still useful for interactive fiction, it should be viewed as a tool to map potential narrative structures instead of actualized ones, which reflects the active role of the reader-player in co-creating meaning. This research adds to the increasing academic acknowledgment of video games as valid literary works and supports the need to adapt structuralist theories to reflect diversity, unpredictability, and negotiated balances typical of non-linear, player-driven stories.

Introduction

Storytelling and narratives have always been influenced by frameworks and structural foundations that house them, starting from the oral tales of ancient times to the printed literature, moving to the evolving digital platforms and media that enable the audience to participate in and shape stories. A notable alteration to the tradition is seen in non-linear narrative forms, storytelling methods that veer from chronological flow, showcasing events in a non-sequential manner or allowing the audience to have a say in the arrangement of narrative components they experience. Non-linear narrative forms represent a shift from conventional storytelling, questioning traditional narrative frameworks. This kind of narrative is characterized by not adhering to a simple, chronological order of events; rather, it presents events in an out-of-order manner, includes multiple simultaneous storylines, or enables the audience to influence or control how the sequence of events is revealed. In contrast to linear narratives, which unfold from exposition to climax to resolution in a predetermined order, non-linear structures tend to fragment the storyline, encouraging the audience to actively piece together meaning by navigating through a web of interconnected scenes, flashbacks, flashforwards, or alternative paths. Non-linear narrative forms represent a shift from conventional storytelling, questioning traditional narrative frameworks. This analysis will apply Tzvetan Todorov's Narrative Theory, which outlines a five-stage process of equilibrium →

disruption → recognition → restoration → new equilibrium, to explore this shift. Although Todorov's framework is essential for understanding linear narratives, its relevance to a non-linear, player-driven experience like *Disco Elysium* prompts important inquiries. Can these stages be recognized in the branching storyline of an interactive fiction? Does the game remain in a constant state of disruption? Non-linear narrative structures present an alteration of traditional storytelling; numerous interactive fictions utilize branching frameworks to create several possible storylines, often resulting in fragmented plots that require managing multiple intersecting storylines (Soares de Lima et al., 2023). Lately, it appears that video games often overlook the equilibrium theory and instead immerse the player in the story midway to expedite their engagement with the action. Prior to discussing the issues of non-linearity, the researcher must establish the distinction between linear and non-linear narratives. Linear narratives are structured in that the audience advances through reaching fixed plot points in a specific order, wherein reaching the end uses a particular path created by the author (McIntosh et al., 2010). Linear storytelling in novels follows Freytag's pyramid or a three-act structure, which is divided into a beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning, there is an exposition, rising action, which leads to the climax in the middle, and the falling action and denouement, where the problem is resolved at the end. This structure works well in any medium, as it solves the problem. McIntosh et al. (2010, para. 5) define "non-linear" as "extending the benefits of linear narratives." The player is given options as to what he or she chooses to do." These options can alter potential elements such as plot points, characters, or other events that are tied to the narrative, based on choices the player makes.

Equilibrium, according to Tzvetan Todorov, is not an intrinsic aspect of culture but rather a fundamental characteristic of narrative structure. In his 1969 work, Todorov defined equilibrium as a "state of balance and normality" found at the narrative's onset, which acts as the stable foundation from which disruption occurs. Nevertheless, cultural, historical, and social contexts significantly influence the nature of that equilibrium, which is deemed "normal" or "balanced" in a particular narrative. For example, in *Disco Elysium*, the starting equilibrium is depicted not as a traditional stable state but as a "post-equilibrium" that players must piece together using fragmented insights about Harry Du Bois's history, his unsuccessful relationship, his struggles with alcoholism, and his collaboration with Kim Kitsuragi. This reconstruction draws from the cultural environment of the game, Revachol, a fictional city influenced by post-revolutionary politics, economic downturns, and class conflict. Consequently, while the idea of equilibrium is both universal and independent of structure, its expression is shaped by cultural factors. The influence of this cultural context is profound: players hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds may have varying interpretations of what defines a "restored order," as the game's moral and political uncertainties defy universal conclusions. As Riessman (2008) emphasizes, narratives "do not stand alone, revealing an 'essential self';" instead, they demand interpretation that reflects the cultural narratives and values prevalent within a specific context.

Yoseph Yapi Taum (2018) examines narratology from Tzvetan Todorov's viewpoint as a field within structuralism that focuses on dissecting narrative frameworks and their influence on readers' interpretations. The term stems from narratio (story or tale) and logos (study or science), highlighting the organized examination of stories and storytelling. Todorov, a Bulgarian-French structuralist, regarded narratology as the structural breakdown of the elements in a story to reveal their roles and interconnections. His theory asserts that every narrative follows a circular pattern that begins with a state of equilibrium, a stable condition disrupted by an event, followed by the awareness of this disruption, attempts to rectify it, and ultimately, the establishment of a new equilibrium. This model highlights transformation: the notion that characters and scenarios develop as they navigate through disruption and restoration. Within this framework, narration is motivated by the quest to regain balance, making Todorov's narratology a valuable approach for analyzing how narratives portray human and societal transformations through structured sequences of conflict and resolution.

The literary text to be analyzed is a form of digital literature known as Interactive Fiction (IF); this form of fiction allows the readers to progress the story in one of several directions based on their choices. An example of this genre is the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. Interactive fiction has changed over the years from turning to other pages based on the readers' choice to simple text commands, and now, with the addition of graphics and illustrations and less textual input, digital interactive fiction has increased in popularity; the choice of dialogue remains (Nagai & York, 2022). IF features a substantial amount of text that involves limited player engagement to read the text presented on the screen, albeit with fewer graphics, gameplay elements, and player displays. Nagai and York (2022, p. 80) continue with, "This type of interactive media falls closer to being a 'story' than it is a game." *Disco Elysium* is selected as the material for analysis due to its emphasis on dialogue, which involves various interactions with characters and a narrative focus. Consequently, the game offers several choices that influence the story's progression at various plot points, leading to a question of how it ensures that players maintain a cohesive understanding of the plot.

The selection of *Disco Elysium* is justified by its widespread critical acclaim and innovative design, which make it an ideal case study for analyzing narrative fragmentation in interactive fiction. The game has received significant acclaim for its deep narrative experimentation, expanding the medium's narrative possibilities through its game mechanics and systems, such as the "thought cabinet" and branching dialogue trees, which allow players to shape their detective character's psyche and the story's trajectory in various ways. Davison's (2024) review of the game recognizes that "*Disco Elysium's* text is

evocative and compelling. It draws you into the experience just like classic capital-A adventures, particularly those that veer heavily into the "interactive fiction" area (para. 18). Therefore, Disco Elysium's recognized mastery in merging complex literary themes with player-driven interactions makes it particularly suitable for investigation.

This study seeks to investigate the relevance of Todorov's narrative framework in the non-linear context of Disco Elysium. By investigating significant narrative pathways and dialogue options, this research will examine how the game both expresses and challenges the conventional phases of the Equilibrium cycle. This research seeks to investigate how the non-linear narrative structure of Disco Elysium corresponds with, disrupts, or reinterprets Todorov's stages of narrative equilibrium. To accomplish this goal, the research will concentrate on (1) pinpointing the game's representation of Todorov's phases (equilibrium, disruption, realization, restored order, and new equilibrium) within its non-linear setup; (2) investigating how player choices rearrange the order within the game's storytelling framework; (3) investigating whether the storyline of the game leads to a 'new equilibrium' or maintains a state of continual disruption; and (4) examining how player involvement leads to a restructuring of Todorov's narrative stages in a non-linear context.

While previous studies on interactive fiction focus on varied elements such as character development, thematic exploration, narrative visualization, and the application of interactive fiction in areas outside the field of literature, there has been limited attention on the narrative structure itself, specifically the non-linearity of an interactive story. Additionally, scholarly work has been scarce in viewing video games and interactive fiction as literary texts worthy of in-depth analysis. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the narrative aspect of story and plot in interactive fiction, providing a fresh perspective on the literary potential of games.

Statement of the Problem

This research seeks to investigate how the game's non-linear, fragmented, and player-centric narrative format transforms the idea of equilibrium. It seeks to establish if Todorov's stages can be recognized in a non-linear fashion, whether the game exists in a constant state of disequilibrium, and how player agency affects the identification and attainment of a final, cohesive state. It specifically seeks to answer the given questions:

1. What structural elements of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium theory are present in the selected interactive narrative?
2. How do player decisions in dialogue and gameplay systems such as the Thought Cabinet, affect the transition from disruption to new equilibrium?
3. How do specific decisions in dialogue choices and game mechanics, such as skill checks and branching narratives, influence the story's main disruption and the outcomes by the end of the game?
4. How does player agency affect the structural validity of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium model in an interactive narrative?

Conceptual Framework

A narrative analysis method will be applied to explore the qualitative data from Disco Elysium. The conceptual framework introduces a revised interpretation of Todorov's model of narrative equilibrium, designed to accommodate the non-linear and player-driven aspects of interactive fiction. It preserves the five fundamental stages, equilibrium, disruption, recognition, restoration, and new equilibrium, but reinterprets each stage as conditional, fragmented, and variable rather than fixed and sequential.

Within the structuralist framework of Todorov, the narrative of Disco Elysium does not simply witness the progression of disruption to restoration but actively determines how, and whenever, these stages unfold. Player agency functions such as dialogue choices and internalization of thoughts (in-game) do not simply navigate through predetermined paths but alter the narrative's flow. In traditional or linear storytelling, disruptions are fixed and restorations are determined by the author, in Disco Elysium, the player's choices influence what is perceived as the disruption, for example, the investigative routes that lead to the killer or how the main character seeks to restore balance. Therefore, player agency does not exist outside of Todorov's framework but serves as a variable that changes disruption and restoration from a static plot into a dynamic process arranged by the player.

The starting equilibrium is framed as a reconstructed state, where stability is achieved gradually by the player rather than being assumed. Disruption is elaborated into a complex condition that includes external, internal, and social conflicts, and recognition is spread across various moments of revelation through dialogue, exploration, and skill assessments. Restoration is portrayed as dependent on player decisions and relationships, with outcomes varying accordingly. The new equilibrium is presented as changeable, illustrating several possible conclusions rather than one definitive resolution. The dashed arrow linking the new equilibrium back to the original equilibrium highlights the unpredictability of narrative

closure in interactive fiction, stressing that achieving a stable state is not assured but hinges on the choices made by the player and the routes they develop.

Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative framework used to explore the narrative fragmentation and non-linearity in Disco Elysium. A qualitative approach is necessary for this inquiry because it aims to understand how players create meaning in the narrative. This focus differs from the current trends in existing research. Wright and Weible (2024) note that recent studies on interactive fiction often emphasize its use in education or thematic exploration. This leaves a noticeable gap in analyses that focus on plot structure and narratives. To fill this gap and examine how non-linear forms influence the interpretive experience, this study will use qualitative methods. Specifically, it will apply narrative analysis as the main method for qualitative data analysis (QDA) to interpret the game's structure.

The corpus for this study consists of narrative segments extracted from Disco Elysium (The Final Cut edition), developed by ZA/UM and released in 2019. The game was accessed through the Steam platform on a personal computer, and data collection was conducted through a focused, completionist-style playthrough. The collection consists of unique narrative segments, featuring important plot developments (such as the discovery of the hanged man, the tribunal scene, and the identification of the murderer), essential dialogue branches (interactions with Kim Kitsuraghi, Joyce Messier, Cuno, and the Deserter), and internal monologues produced by the game's skill system (for instance, Inland Empire, Volition, Drama). All information was gathered in real time through screenshot captures and manual transcription of the text displayed on the screen. Transcription adhered to the guidelines set forth by Riessman (2008), who states that "transcription is profoundly interpretive as the process cannot be separated from language theory" (p. 28). Since Disco Elysium is a text-driven interactive story featuring pre-written conversations, transcription required replicating the precise in-game text while maintaining its original structure, line breaks, and punctuation. In cases of extended dialogue passages, ellipses (...) were employed to signify omitted content.

Methods

Since the aesthetics of non-linearity in interactive fiction are through player-driven context, the researcher will make use of narrative analysis as the method for the study. A structuralist criticism or lens will be employed to interpret the data.

Procedure

Initially, the researcher will outline the analytical parameters. This will include detailing the specific narrative components to be analyzed, which will consist of significant plot points (e.g., the moment the hanged man is discovered, the revelation of the murderer, the final confrontation) and essential character exchanges (e.g., dialogues with Kim Kitsuragi, Cuno, or Joyce Messier). Narrative segments will be recorded and classified based on their role in the equilibrium cycle. Focus will be placed on how stages can occur out of sequence or concurrently, rather than following a predetermined order. Additionally, the researcher will establish key indicators for structuralist themes such as the destabilization of meaning, the multiplicity of interpretations, and the player's role in collaboratively shaping the narrative.

Data Collection

The researcher will carry out a focused playthrough of Disco Elysium. In this playthrough, the study will take a "completionist or single-playthrough" approach to uncover as many narrative branches as possible, while making intentional saves at crucial decision points to explore different dialogue and action paths. Information will be collected in real-time: dialogue trees and their branches will be documented; screenshots will be taken to capture important choices and their immediate results; and field notes will be kept to record the context of decisions, the researcher's interpretation of the plot at that time, and the conditional logic needed to access certain narrative segments (e.g., skill checks, previous choices). All information will be safely stored and organized in a digital database for future analysis.

Narrative Analysis

A systematic documentation of narrative elements within Disco Elysium will be conducted; the data, in the form of transcribed dialogue sequences, screenshots of branching paths, and notes on quest progression, will be stored securely on a device. The data collection entails a focused playthrough of the game, targeting key main story beats and character interactions. Scenes and dialogue trees were chosen based on their narrative significance and their potential for branching outcomes, as some interactions offer only minor flavor text while others significantly alter the plot or character relationships. Furthermore, the inherent variability of player choice will be considered, as accessing certain narrative fragments is dependent on prior decisions and skill checks.

Results and Discussion

This chapter examines data analysis, providing an in-depth investigation of the specified research subjects and inquiries. The focus of this study was to investigate how the non-linear, fragmented, and player-driven narrative style of Disco Elysium redefines the concept of Todorov's narrative equilibrium. In particular, it aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) What structural elements of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium theory are present in the selected interactive narrative? (2) How do player decisions in dialogue and gameplay systems, such as the Thought Cabinet, affect the transition from disruption to a new equilibrium? (3) How do specific decisions in dialogue choices and game mechanics, such as skill checks and branching narratives, influence the story's main disruption and the outcomes by the end of the game? (4) How does player agency affect the structural validity of Todorov's narrative equilibrium model in an interactive narrative?

RQ1: Structural Elements of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium Present in Disco Elysium

Narrative Stages	Todorov's Swan-Geese Example	Disco Elysium Representation	Transcript of Narrative (in-game text)	Analysis
Equilibrium	A peasant family lives in peace. The parents go to work, leaving their daughter to watch over her infant brother	Harry wakes up in a hostel with total memory loss.	"Really- all recollection of the person you are, the people in your life and even the world you're in has drowned in a sea of blood alcohol. This was no mere night of drinking, it was a deluge. Of world-ending proportions."	The game subverts Todorov's equilibrium by presenting a state where the player cannot recognize the prior equilibrium because amnesia has erased it. Equilibrium must be reconstructed retroactively through exploration and dialogue, making the player an active participant in the story's past.
Disruption	One day, while she is gone, swan-geese arrive and abduct her brother	The primary disruption is when the hanged man discovered behind the hostel. Harry does not remember anything about the murder case or being a detective.	"Behind the hostel, a body hangs from a large tree. The corpse sways slightly in the morning breeze. It has been here for days. The victim's face is swollen, unrecognizable. A bullet hole marks the forehead. Yellow police tape cordons off the area. 'Murder,' Kim says quietly. 'We have a murder.'" (Discovery of the hanged man)	The primary disruption is external (murder investigation), internal (Harry's amnesia and fractured psyche), and societal (political tensions in Revachol). Unlike linear narratives with a single disruption, Disco Elysium presents layered disruptions that players must navigate simultaneously, each requiring its own recognition and resolution.
Recognition	The sister realizes her brother is missing and seeks help from magical figures (stove, apple tree, river)	With help from Kim Kitsuragi, Harry's partner, they try to solve the case and identify the killer.	Dialogue option branch during confrontation with the Deserter: [Volition - Legendary: Success] 'You shot him. Not because of the money. Not because of the union. Because of her. Because of what they took from you.' The old man's eyes widen. His hand trembles. Tears form. 'How... how do you know?' he whispers. 'I see her in your eyes,' you say. 'I see what you lost.'	Recognition in Disco Elysium is not a singular moment but distributed across dozens of potential realizations. This particular recognition, accessing the Deserter's true motivation, requires a successful Legendary Volition check, meaning not all players will experience this recognition. Player skill choices directly determine whether and how recognition occurs.

Restoration	The sister performs tasks for magical helpers; they guide her; she rescues her brother	Confrontation with the killer; reconciliation with Kim. Conclusion of the Tribunal.	"The tribunal is over. Three men lie dead on the boardwalk. Kim stands beside you, his shirt torn, his glasses askew, but alive. 'We got them,' he says. 'Not all of them, but enough.' The Hardie boys drag the remaining mercenaries away. The crowd disperses. The sun sets over the pale. Nothing is resolved. Not really. But for now, the shooting has stopped."	Restored order is always partial and conditional. The quality of restoration depends on player choices, whether Kim survived, whether Harry maintained his composure, and whether allies were cultivated. The game denies players the comfort of complete restoration, reflecting its philosophical stance that some disruptions leave permanent scars.
New Equilibrium	The family is reunited; sister has learned responsibility; transformation through the journey	Harry's acceptance of truth; acceptance of his wife's rejection, and departure from Revachol	[Ending sequence: Kim looks at you from across the Kineema. 'Well, detective? Where to now?' Dialogue options: 'Precinct 41. I have work to do.' / 'I don't know. Somewhere else. Anywhere else.' / 'Stay here. This city... it's all I have left.']	The new equilibrium is radically player-determined. The three endings represent different forms of acceptance: professional reintegration, open-ended departure, or melancholic stasis. None offers conventional "happiness"; each carries its own cost and compromise, reinforcing the game's thesis that healing is never complete.

Table 1: Todorov's Narrative Stages in Disco Elysium's Key Events

This section provides an analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the narrative analysis of Disco Elysium, concentrating on pinpointing the existence and expression of Todorov's five-stage equilibrium, disruption, realization, restored order, and new equilibrium within the game's non-linear framework. By methodically recording significant plot developments, dialogue exchanges, and character interactions, we revealed the subsequent insights.

Before analyzing the game's structural components, we should summarize Todorov's core principles for narrative examination. In his article, *The 2 Principles of Narrative* (1971), Todorov argues that narratives are constructed from two essential processes: the sequence of events and the change of states. By utilizing the Russian folktale "The Swan-Geese" as his main example, Todorov shows how any narrative can be simplified to a fundamental chronological framework or structure. Todorov's examination demonstrates that these phases are applicable to all narratives, regardless of their linearity. The table below would provide a point of comparison on how Disco Elysium presents or modify for each narrative stage.

Initial Equilibrium.

Unlike conventional stories that start with a clear situation of stability, Disco Elysium introduces what can be termed a "post-equilibrium" state. The game begins with the protagonist, Harry Du Bois, waking up in a disordered hostel room with total memory loss. This lack of memory leads to an immediate contradiction: the player is unable to identify the disruption since they have no recollection of the previously stable state. As Todorov (1969) suggests, narratives typically commence with a state of equilibrium where "balance and normalcy are present." However, in Disco Elysium, this initial state is disjointed—the player reconstructs what the equilibrium may have been through environmental hints, interactions with other characters, and internal reflections. This observation corresponds with Taum's (2018) view that narratives can "leave out the first two elements and begin with a situation that is already unsatisfactory." Therefore, the game's beginning exemplifies Todorov's "hemicycle," an unfinished cycle that still holds the potential for a complete narrative framework.

The results of this current study both coincide with and differ from Todorov's initial framework. Like Hemalatha and Ramya Niranjani's (2025) application of Todorov's theory to Rebecca Ross's *The Queen's Rising*, the game features identifiable stages of narrative development. In contrast to the linear novel analyzed in their research, Disco Elysium disperses

narrative stages across various threads, rather than unfolding them in chronological order. For example, the equilibrium stage is not a single moment but a composite understanding that the player forms through exploring Harry's past, including his failed relationship, his struggles with alcoholism, and his partnership with Kim Kitsuragi. This aligns with Aarseth's (1994) assertion that in non-linear works, the reader cannot "perceive the entire text," as understanding becomes an active and reconstructive endeavor.

Disruption and Multiple Recognition Points.

The main disruption is the body of the hanged man found behind the hostel, introduced early in the game. However, the analysis shows that this one event sets off various layers of disruption. The table below demonstrates how the disruptions from the game spread outward: the murder investigation (external disruption) and Harry's memory loss and fragmented psyche (internal disruption). This multifaceted perspective on disruption builds upon Todorov's model by illustrating how interactive fiction can maintain multiple simultaneous imbalances.

The recognition stage, often viewed as a single point of acknowledgment, actually unfolds through numerous realizations throughout the gameplay experience. By choosing the dialogue options with key characters like Kim Kitsuragi and Joyce Messier, the analysis demonstrates that recognition happens gradually. As noted by Lan et al. (2021), non-linear narratives "offer multiple entry points and paths, supporting various interpretations." In *Disco Elysium*, every successful skill check, every piece of evidence found, and every branch in conversation serves as a partial recognition that enhances the player's comprehension of the main disruption. This indicates that in interactive fiction, Todorov's recognition stage functions as a scattered network of points instead of a single narrative moment.

Restored Order and New Equilibrium.

The concluding parts of Todorov's model, restoration and establishing a new equilibrium, show a notable deviation from standard interpretations in *Disco Elysium*. An exploration of various narrative branches suggests that these stages are not definitive endings, but rather conditions dependent on the decisions players make throughout the story. This assertion aligns with McIntosh et al.'s (2010) comment that branching narrative frameworks "offer players choices that often lead to further possibilities, which can affect the overall direction of the plot."

The highlight of the restored order stage features a showdown with the murderer, either Ruby, the intoxicated drug producer, or the Deserter, who is the real shooter. However, the way this restoration unfolds differs significantly. In situations where players foster a strong bond with Kim, the restored order includes professional acknowledgment and resolution in their relationship. Conversely, in scenarios where players' decisions create distance between them and Kim or lead to self-destructive actions, the restoration feels unfulfilled. Thus, the game questions Todorov's idea that restored order signifies a return to equilibrium; instead, it indicates that in interactive storytelling, restoration is invariably incomplete and influenced by the player's experiences.

The new equilibrium also shows significant variability. Todorov (1969) characterizes this phase as "the restoration of the original equilibrium," albeit altered by the events of the narrative. In *Disco Elysium*, the player's choices heavily influence this alteration. The concluding sequences of the game—Harry's dialogue with the phasmid, his acceptance of Dora's rejection, and his choice to either stay in Revachol or leave—illustrate an equilibrium that can only be comprehended in light of the player's unique decisions. This observation is in line with Soares de Lima, Feijó, and Furtado's (2023) claim that, in character-driven interactive stories, "characters often serve as narrative anchors that guide players through fragmented storytelling," and the equilibrium that emerges reflects this directed yet personal journey.

RQ2: The transition from Disruption to New Equilibrium

This part explores the player choices in dialogue and gameplay mechanics, especially the Thought Cabinet, on the progression between narrative stages in *Disco Elysium*. The examination centers on decision moments and their impacts throughout the story arc.

The Thought Cabinet acts as a unique narrative system in *Disco Elysium*, playing a vital role in facilitating the shift from chaos to balance. By tracking the internalization and progression of different thoughts, such as "Racist Lorry Driver" and "Actual Art Degree," the discussion shows that this system serves as a concrete manifestation of character growth that is typically attributed to linear storytelling. The system or game mechanic enables players to influence Harry's psychological recovery, which directly affects the quality and nature of the new balance reached. This insight aligns with Vázquez-Herrero's (2021) assertion that non-linear formats "encourage a heightened sense of engagement and personalization in storytelling." In contrast to linear narratives where character development follows predetermined paths set by the author, *Disco Elysium* grants substantial restorative power to the player through this system.

Dialogue choices serve as key restorative mechanisms. Analyzing dialogue trees during crucial narrative moments indicates that player selections are the main way to transition from disruption to resolution. By examining interactions with Kim Kitsuragi, the game's most important relationship, the study uncovers patterns in how dialogue choices influence narrative progression.

Dialogue choices in Disco Elysium are the primary mechanism through which players exercise agency and shape the narrative trajectory. Disco Elysium's dialogue choices are organized around skills—24 distinct facets of Harry's psyche (e.g., Volition, Inland Empire, Conceptualization, Empathy, Authority)—unlike traditional dialogue systems that offer variations of the same response. Each dialogue option is associated with a specific skill, and the success or failure of that option depends on the player's skill point allocation and dice rolls. For example, a dialogue choice labeled [Empathy - Medium: Success] will only succeed if Harry's Empathy skill meets a threshold and the dice roll is favorable; failure produces a different narrative outcome. The choices are presented to the player as a list of possible responses, ranging from straightforward and professional to bizarre, poetic, aggressive, or self-destructive. Some choices are locked entirely unless the player has internalized specific Thoughts through the Thought Cabinet system. Key examples of dialogue choice categories include: (1) Investigative choices that advance the murder investigation, (2) Interpersonal choices that affect relationships with characters like Kim, (3) Internal choices that represent Harry's inner monologue and affect his psychological state, (4) Political choices that align Harry with one of several ideological positions (Communist, Fascist, Moralist, or Ultraliberal), and (5) Absurd/Comedic choices that prioritize humor over narrative progress. Each choice type carries different consequences for the narrative's equilibrium, affecting whether recognition is achieved, how restoration unfolds, and what form the new equilibrium takes.

In line with the findings of Nagai and York (2022) regarding the influence of interactive fiction on reader engagement, Disco Elysium necessitates "active involvement and critical thinking" from players as they work toward a resolution. The dialogue mechanics require players to decipher Harry's disjointed mental state and make decisions that either lead to recovery or strengthen self-destructive behaviors. For example, in the early stages of the game, dialogue choices with Kim can range from collaborative interactions to strange, alienating conduct. Players who frequently opt for cooperative responses unlock progressively supportive exchanges, resulting in Kim defending Harry during crucial confrontations. Conversely, players who select antagonistic responses face increasing isolation, significantly altering their path toward balance.

This dynamic corresponds with Aarseth's (1994) idea of "forked choices," where choosing one option inherently eliminates others. The examination shows that Disco Elysium amplifies this idea by transforming these choices from being solely structural to also being psychological; every dialogue choice adds to a gradual depiction of Harry's ability for healing.

The skill check mechanism in the game serves as a probabilistic means to achieve recognition and healing, utilizing 24 unique skills that reflect various parts of Harry's consciousness. In contrast to conventional storylines where a character's abilities are taken for granted or dictated by the author, Disco Elysium requires that the player makes choices and faces random outcomes to enable the character to perceive truths and seek healing.

The results indicate that skill checks add an element of uncertainty to Todorov's narrative development. Achieving success or experiencing failure on these checks can significantly impact a player's ability to reach recognition and restoration chances. Additionally, player decisions serve as the primary mediating mechanism for navigating Todorov's narrative stages, fundamentally transforming the relationship between disruption and equilibrium from a deterministic causal chain into a contingent, player-driven process. Specifically, the Thought Cabinet system allows players to actively shape Harry's psychological framework by internalizing thoughts that modify his perceptions, dialogue options, and skill probabilities—for instance, internalizing "Actual Art Degree" unlocks sophisticated cultural commentary and reframes Harry's identity as an intellectual, contributing to a professional validation ending. Dialogue choices function as restorative mechanisms wherein players must interpret Harry's fragmented psyche and make decisions that either progress toward healing (e.g., choosing empathetic responses that build trust with Kim) or reinforce self-destructive patterns (e.g., choosing nihilistic or aggressive responses that alienate allies). Skill checks introduce probabilistic elements that can either facilitate or impede progression toward recognition and restoration. A failed Legendary Volition check during the final confrontation may result in the player never uncovering the Deserter's true motivation, leading to an incomplete state of equilibrium. The Thought Cabinet system especially illustrates how player agency functions not just at specific decision points but continuously over time, as internalized thoughts alter the entire narrative environment. In contrast to linear narratives where the author determines the shift from disruption to equilibrium, Disco Elysium distributes this power among the player, the game's systems, and the emergent interaction between them. The quality of the newly established equilibrium

This discovery builds upon Soares de Lima, Feijó, and Furtado's (2023) study of character-driven interactive stories by illustrating how game mechanics can either enhance or hinder narrative advancement toward equilibrium. Whether Harry achieves psychological resolution, professional validation, or continued self-destruction is directly proportional to the cumulative choices made throughout the gameplay experience. In sum, player decisions do not simply select between pre-

written endings; they actively constitute the narrative's restorative arc, making the transition from disruption to equilibrium an emergent property of player agency rather than a fixed structural feature of the text.

RQ3: Specific Decisions Influencing the Story's Main Disruption and Outcomes

This section examines how specific dialogue options and game mechanics affect the central disruption of the narrative, the murder investigation, and the final results at the game's conclusion. By systematically documenting branching paths at pivotal decision points, this research uncovers trends in how player choices influence narrative outcomes.

The murder of the hanged man acts as the primary disruption in the narrative; however, the analysis indicates that this disruption functions differently in interactive fiction compared to conventional detective stories. Unlike traditional mysteries, where clues build toward an inevitable conclusion, Disco Elysium renders the investigation process contingent upon player skill and decisions.

The different routes highlight two main paths that lead to distinct recognition results. Players who investigate evidence concerning the drug trade ultimately pinpoint Ruby as the suspected wrongdoer; those who explore political dimensions uncover the Deserter as the actual shooter. These diverging routes cannot occur simultaneously; committing to one investigative method inevitably restricts access to the other. This observation aligns directly with Aarseth's (1994) assertion that branched choices create textual ambiguity in which "neither of which can exist alongside the other and both are obviously different from the text itself."

Primary Investigation Focus	Key Evidence Discovered	Killer Identified	Recognition Quality
Drug trade connections	Ruby's hideout; cryptid research	Ruby (false resolution)	Partial; requires further investigation
Political conspiracy	Deserter's location; tribunal evidence	The Deserter (true resolution)	Complete; resolves main disruption
Tribunal event survival	N/A (depends on prior choices)	Varies based on survival outcomes	Compromised; equilibrium partially restored

Table 2: Different Branches and Recognition Outcomes

This branching framework contests Todorov's belief in a singular form of recognition. In Disco Elysium, recognition is not a static narrative moment but an outcome that varies based on player decisions. This observation aligns with Lan et al.'s (2021) claim that non-linear narratives "disturb traditional notions of storytelling by encouraging audiences to actively participate in piecing together fragmented narratives."

The tribunal event, characterized by a confrontation between union members and hired guns, stands out as one of the game's crucial decision points, with repercussions that extend throughout the rest of the story. The analysis highlights how the dialogue choices made before this moment can dramatically influence the outcome of the event and, in turn, the path toward balance.

Players who engage in compassionate dialogue with Cuno, the tough child character, can unlock the option to safeguard him during the tribunal. Those who have cultivated trust with Kim may find his help in diffusing the conflict. In contrast, players who have distanced themselves from their partner or neglected to foster relationships must face the tribunal on their own, which could lead to deadly outcomes.

This finding exemplifies McIntosh et al.'s (2010) assertion that non-linear narratives are "often linked by conditions," indicating that the tribunal's outcome relies on a complex network of previous decisions that might appear unrelated at the time they were made.

The encounter with the phasmid, a cryptid creature featured in the game's final act, serves as a distinctive narrative moment in which the various disruptions within the game converge toward a possible resolution. The analysis demonstrates that the ability to access and interpret this encounter is influenced by earlier player decisions, especially those concerning the development of the Inland Empire skill and interaction with the game's supernatural elements. This division significantly influences the quality of the new equilibrium reached. The phasmid's inquiry, "In dark times, should the stars also disappear?" provides a lens for understanding Harry's flaws that only a select group of players can interpret.

This insight builds upon Hemalatha and Ramya Niranjani S.'s (2025) interpretation of Todorov's theory by illustrating how interactive narratives can make the potential for meaningful resolution dependent on player decisions. The new equilibrium is not assured; it must be attained through careful navigation of the game's intricate decision-making landscape.

RQ4: Player Agency and the Structural Validity of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium Model

Narrative Element	Equilibrium State	Disruption Nature	Recognition Access	Restoration Quality	New Equilibrium Form
Murder Investigation	Pre-murder Revachol	Hanged man discovery	Evidence-dependent	Apprehension of the killer	Justice served or denied
Harry's Psychology	Pre-amnesia identity	Memory loss; alcoholism	Skill-dependent	Self-understanding	Acceptance or denial
Political Conflict	Union-management tension	Tribunal event	Faction choices	Resolution or escalation	New political order
Kim Partnership	Professional distance	Building trust	Dialogue-dependent	Mutual respect	Continued partnership or separation

Table 3: Narrative stages across the game

This section explores how player autonomy in Disco Elysium influences the structural reliability of Todorov's narrative equilibrium model, evaluating if the framework is still relevant for examining interactive fiction or if it needs considerable rethinking. The analysis shows that Todorov's five stages still appear in Disco Elysium, although the game represents them significantly differently from traditional linear narratives. This observation implies that the model can adapt structurally to fit non-linear storytelling while still being analytically useful. As Taum (2018) points out, Todorov's framework recognizes that narratives might "skip the first two elements and begin with a situation that is already unsatisfactory" or "leave out the last two, concluding in tragedy." This built-in flexibility reinforces the model's relevance to interactive fiction.

The examination also uncovers notable shortcomings in utilizing Todorov's framework for player-driven narratives. The model presumes a single narrative path leading to a resolution, while Disco Elysium maintains various concurrent progressions across distinct narrative layers: the murder inquiry, Harry's mental healing, the political landscape of Revachol, and personal relationships. Each layer adheres to its own equilibrium path, and these paths may advance at varying speeds or achieve different qualities of resolution.

Table 3 displays the allocation of narrative stages throughout the various dimensions of Disco Elysium, demonstrating that Todorov's model should be applied in multiple ways rather than just once.

This decentralized structure complicates the straightforward use of Todorov's framework. Instead of a singular narrative progression, Disco Elysium consists of numerous interconnected cycles that can either support or conflict with one another. This observation is consistent with the insights of Soares de Lima, Feijó, and Furtado (2023), who noted that interactive narratives necessitate "navigating multiple overlapping storylines."

This decentralized framework makes it difficult to apply Todorov's model in a straightforward manner. Rather than following a single narrative trajectory, Disco Elysium features a variety of interlinked cycles that may either reinforce or oppose each other. This observation aligns with the findings of Soares de Lima, Feijó, and Furtado (2023), who highlighted that interactive narratives require "navigating multiple overlapping storylines." This observation builds on Aarseth's (1994) comment regarding the reader's engagement with non-linear texts: it compels us to take ownership of our reading choices and recognize that the text is always distinct from us. In Disco Elysium, player agency creates a distinction between the narrative's structural possibilities and its realized expression. Todorov's model outlines the possible structures and the various stages that we could encounter. Still, it cannot predict which stages specific players will realize or the sequence in which they will do so.

The results indicate that Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium model needs to be modified for the purpose of analyzing interactive fiction. The model's significance lies not in its ability to forecast specific narrative developments but in offering a framework for detailing the structural elements that players engage with. As Lan et al. (2021) note, compelling storytelling in interactive media often exists within "the interplay of organization and freedom." Todorov's model provides the organizational framework, while player choice offers the freedom. This research suggests that Todorov's model describes possible narrative structures in interactive contexts rather than concrete ones. The stages of equilibrium serve as potential

options that players may choose to explore or not, based on their decisions. This reinterpretation preserves the model's usefulness for analysis while recognizing the significant role of player agency in shaping narrative structure.

Examining Disco Elysium using Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium framework highlights both the model's ongoing applicability and its drawbacks when utilized in interactive fiction. The five stages—equilibrium, disruption, recognition, restored order, and new equilibrium—can still be recognized within the game's non-linear framework, although they appear quite differently compared to traditional linear narratives. The Thought Cabinet feature and dialogue options serve as key tools for moving between stages, while skill checks introduce probabilistic factors that can either aid or hinder progress toward a resolution. The decisions made by players play a crucial role in determining access to recognition and the quality of the new equilibrium reached, resulting in various possible narrative paths instead of just one. Todorov's framework continues to hold analytical significance for interactive fiction when interpreted as outlining possible narrative forms that players can bring to life through their decisions, although its premise of a singular, predetermined advancement necessitates considerable modification.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary

This qualitative research sought to investigate the applicability of Tzvetan Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium framework within the non-linear environment of Disco Elysium. Utilizing structuralist theory as the central perspective and narrative analysis as the method of qualitative inquiry, the study analyzed how the game's disjointed, player-driven storytelling both reflects and contests the traditional stages of the equilibrium cycle. Through dialogue sequences, Thought Cabinet internalizations, skill checks, and branching narrative paths, the study investigated four research questions: (1) the structural elements of Todorov's theory present in the game; (2) how player decisions affect the transition from disruption to new equilibrium; (3) how specific choices influence the main disruption and narrative outcomes; and (4) how player agency affects the structural validity of Todorov's model in interactive fiction.

Structural Elements of Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium Present in Disco Elysium.

The analysis showed that Todorov's five-stage equilibrium, disruption, realization, restored order, and new equilibrium can still be identified in Disco Elysium, although their expression differs greatly from traditional linear narratives. The starting equilibrium is depicted as a fragmented "post-equilibrium" condition that players must piece together through conversations and exploration. The main disruption, represented by the murder of the hanged man, creates multiple layers of conflict external, internal, and societal—leading to ongoing imbalances throughout various narrative dimensions. Recognition happens gradually through various moments distributed across dialogue options and skill checks instead of one single epiphany. The restored order and new equilibrium are outcomes determined by player choices, differing considerably based on decisions made during the narrative experience. This observation indicates that Todorov's framework has the structural adaptability to support non-linear storytelling while remaining analytically valuable.

Player Decisions and Transition from Disruption to New Equilibrium.

The analysis revealed that the Thought Cabinet system serves as a physical embodiment of character growth, enabling players to influence Harry's psychological healing and directly affect the quality of the new balance achieved. Dialogue choices emerged as the main tool for transitioning from disruption to resolution, with cumulative decisions leading to either progressive healing or the reinforcement of self-destructive habits. Skill checks introduced elements of probability that could either support or hinder the journey towards recognition and restoration, with the success or failure of critical checks significantly impacting whether players had access to opportunities for meaningful resolution. These results suggest that interactive fiction distributes restorative authority across various systems, making narrative progression dependent on the player's navigation through intricate decision-making processes.

Specific Decisions Influencing the Story's Disruptions and Outcomes.

The examination of investigative sectors indicated that murder investigations function differently in interactive fiction compared to traditional detective stories, with two main paths resulting in distinct recognition outcomes: the drug trade route pointing to Ruby as the obvious suspect and the political investigation route uncovering the Deserter as the actual shooter. These paths cannot exist simultaneously, illustrating Aarseth's notion of diverging choices. The tribunal event emerged as a pivotal moment where the results were influenced by a complex network of preceding decisions, with repercussions that resonated throughout the rest of the narrative. The encounter with the phasmid demonstrated that access to and interpretation of significant narrative moments were contingent upon the prior development of specific skills

and interaction with supernatural elements. These observations imply that interactive fiction creates the very potential for substantial resolution.

Player Agency and the Structural Validity of Todorov's Model.

The analysis showed that Todorov's five stages can be identified across various narrative elements—the murder investigation, Harry's mental recovery, the political strife, and the collaboration with Kim—each following its path of equilibrium. This dispersed structure calls into question the singular application of the model, indicating that interactive fiction necessitates the management of several interconnected cycles rather than a linear narrative progression. The unpredictability introduced by player agency complicates the model, which was originally meant for fixed narratives, since choices might alter causality at multiple junctures, leading to a discrepancy between structural possibilities and the realized narrative form. The study suggested that Todorov's model should be perceived in interactive settings as relating to potential narrative frameworks instead of realized narratives, preserving its analytical value while recognizing the transformative influence of player agency.

Conclusion

Apart from its structural discoveries, this research ultimately points to wider inquiries within the humanities, including the essence of storytelling, human agency, and the attraction of interactive systems. The alteration of Todorov's model in *Disco Elysium* signifies not just a change in narrative structure but also a change in how people interact with meaning itself. The essence of interactive fiction's appeal stems from its representation of choice and consequence, reflecting the basic nature of human life. Unlike traditional narratives that present a pre-formed world with events progressing according to an author's intentions, interactive fiction immerses the player in the story as an engaged participant, presenting them with decisions that hold significance, complexity, and often lasting effects. This element of interactivity brings about a sense of existential ambiguity, where results are neither assured nor completely foreseeable.

The element of surprise is essential to this experience. Interactive fiction thrives on its unpredictability. Every choice either creates new possibilities or eliminates others, leading to outcomes that may either meet or diverge from the player's expectations. This element of surprise keeps players engaged, as they constantly navigate the space between their intentions and the actual results. Therefore, surprise serves not only as a narrative tool but also as a fundamental aspect of the medium, reflecting the inherent unpredictability of real-life experiences.

Tightly connected to this phenomenon is the player's quest for a "correct" or "ideal" ending. The wish to attain the best possible resolution exposes a deeper psychological and philosophical drive: the human tendency toward closure, coherence, and moral clarity. This urge often presents itself as a continuous need to replay, reload, and retry returning to significant choices, re-rolling unsuccessful skill checks, and examining different paths until the sought-after result is achieved. Within interactive fiction, players often find themselves attempting again and again until they "win" or until they attain a state of personal fulfillment with the narrative they have crafted. This behavior indicates not just a quest for the best gameplay results but a more profound necessity to resolve uncertainty, reconcile inconsistencies, and impose structure on the disorder of a branching, non-linear storyline.

Nonetheless, *Disco Elysium* resists this longing by offering frequently ambiguous endings, unfinished, or emotionally intricate. The lack of a singular "correct" ending calls into question the belief that narratives—and by extension, life can be easily resolved. Rather, the game proposes that equilibrium is not simply a return to stability but a negotiated state, influenced by compromise, loss, and partial understanding. This interaction highlights something important about the player. Interactive fiction transforms into an arena where people face not only the story but also their own inclinations, be it empathy, aggression, curiosity, or avoidance. The decisions made during gameplay are not random; they showcase the player's values, priorities, and interpretive approaches. Thus, the experience of playing evolves into a method of self-reflection, where the player's identity is both conveyed and challenged through their choices. Additionally, the appeal of this genre can be comprehended by its ability to blend order and liberty. Gamers are attracted to interactive fiction since it provides a harmony between direction and independence: a defined environment with its own regulations and mechanisms, yet flexible enough to permit individual expression. This dynamic fosters a distinctively engaging experience, where significance is not simply accepted but actively generated.

Disco Elysium marks a notable advancement in narrative structure, showcasing how interactive fiction both challenges and enriches conventional storytelling methods. The analysis indicates that although Todorov's Narrative Equilibrium theory can still be identified within the game's framework, its application necessitates considerable reinterpretation to encompass player-driven, non-linear narratives. The findings of the study lead to the following conclusions:

Firstly, the narrative stages outlined in Todorov's model do not vanish within interactive fiction but are instead distributed across various systems and player choices. The equilibrium, disruption, recognition, restored order, and new equilibrium are still present as structural possibilities that players have the option to actualize through their actions. This distribution shifts the model from a linear progression to a network of potential narrative routes.

Secondly, the concept of player agency significantly impacts how narrative stages are interconnected. In linear narratives, the transition from disruption to recognition to restoration is dictated by the author's intent. In *Disco Elysium*, the choices made by players can create gaps between these stages—players might reach recognition without achieving restoration or attain psychological balance while leaving external disruptions unresolved. This observation indicates that interactive fiction introduces a degree of narrative complexity that traditional structuralist frameworks cannot handle.

The game's multimodal features, such as the Thought Cabinet system, skill checks, branching dialogue trees, and visual-spatial design, serve not only as gameplay tools but also as narrative frameworks that influence how players engage with and interpret the story. These systems establish a "negotiated equilibrium," where the ultimate balance arises from the interplay between the creators' intentions and the players' decisions.

The research reveals that structuralist methods continue to be effective for examining interactive fiction, as long as they are modified to account for the distributed and conditional aspects of narrative development in player-driven settings. Todorov's model provides a helpful lexicon for articulating narrative elements, even as the connections among those elements grow more intricate in non-linear narratives.

Subsequently, this work adds to the expanding discourse that views video games and interactive fiction as valid literary texts deserving of thorough analysis. By illustrating how *Disco Elysium* mirrors and contests traditional narrative frameworks, this research advocates for the integration of digital interactive works into the wider literary studies field.

This research ultimately shows that interactive fiction broadens the boundaries of narrative theory by emphasizing the participant's role in determining narrative outcomes. When applied to these texts, Todorov's model needs to be rethought not as a closed loop but as an open framework that accepts multiplicity, uncertainty, and the active engagement of the reader-player. This rethinking uncovers that narrative is not simply a series of events but a process of creating meaning, intricately linked with human cognition, emotion, and agency.

Recommendations

The present study's selection of *Disco Elysium* as its primary material, while justified by the game's critical acclaim and narrative richness, introduced significant analytical complexity due to its multimodal nature—the integration of voice acting, environmental graphics, complex skill systems, and non-textual atmospheric elements made it difficult to isolate purely narrative features from gameplay mechanics. Future researchers should consider selecting simpler interactive fiction as their subject of analysis, such as pure text-based works like *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson or *Galatea* by Emily Short, which rely exclusively on text without visual or audio distractions. Alternatively, researchers could examine the *Choose Your Own Adventure* book series or Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead*, which offers branching narratives but with simpler mechanics than *Disco Elysium*. This approach would allow for a more focused analysis of how interactive elements specifically affect narrative progression without the confounding variables introduced by multimodal complexity.

This study highlighted that *Disco Elysium*'s multimodal features, including the elaborate Thought Cabinet system, 24 unique skill checks with probabilistic results, richly illustrated visual environments, and intricate audio design, created considerable challenges for analysis when trying to isolate and evaluate narrative structure. Although these multimodal elements are essential to the game's artistic success, they complicate the systematic documentation of narrative phases and the tracking of player choice outcomes. Future researchers may discover that interactive fiction with fewer modalities, such as text-based works with minimal visuals or games that mainly focus on branching dialogue without complex gameplay systems, facilitates a clearer application of structuralist frameworks. Examples of such works include classic text-based interactive fiction like *A Dark Room* (2013), which maintains narrative complexity while reducing extraneous gameplay elements, or other text-based games from itch.io like *Wayfarer* by Idrelle Games or *Animalia* by Ian Michael Waddell. This approach would enable researchers to focus more directly on narrative structure without the confounding influence of multimodal complexity.

In the present study, the researcher used structuralism as the theoretical framework. The study's reliance on structuralist theory, specifically Todorov's equilibrium model, assumes that narratives possess an underlying, discoverable structure that can be mapped and analyzed. However, *Disco Elysium* exhibits distinctly post-structuralist characteristics, including fragmentation across multiple narrative threads, intertextual references to diverse literary and cultural traditions, and metanarrative elements that question the nature of storytelling itself. Future researchers should employ post-structuralist

theory as an alternative or complementary lens to address the limitations of structuralism in capturing the instability and multiplicity of meaning in interactive fiction. In addition to that, using a post-structuralist framework or lens would complement the nature of interactive fictions, since it features fragmentation, metanarratives, and intertextuality. Interactive Fictions have numerous intertextualities, like referencing different literary texts, philosophical works, and parodies of different characters. Furthermore, the game's fragmented storytelling approach, featuring scattered recognition instances and various possible outcomes, resonates more with post-structuralist ideas of decentralized meaning and textual interpretation. The existence of metanarratives, especially the game's self-aware critique of detective fiction tropes and political ideologies, encourages examination using frameworks that challenge overarching narratives and singular meanings.

Lastly, future research should conduct comparative studies examining how the same narrative material transforms when adapted between linear and interactive formats. A promising approach would be to analyze a narrative that exists in both linear form (novel, film, or linear game) and interactive form (interactive fiction or branching narrative game), examining how the narrative's structural elements change across formats. An example or case of this would be The Walking Dead franchise, which has numerous formats like the comic books, television series, and Telltale Games interactive game. This distinctive setup enables scholars to explore how identical characters, environments, and thematic elements operate differently when influenced by a linear narrative shaped by the author versus decisions made interactively by players.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the colleagues and institutions who provided guidance, feedback, and support throughout the conduct of this research and the preparation of this manuscript. Any remaining errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.