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*As a manuscript*

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AESTHETICS OF THE VIDEO GAME MEDIUM: SPECTATOR AND  
GAMER EXPERIENCE IN INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENT

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# 1. General characteristics of the work

## Relevance of the research

The relevance lies in the small number of multifaceted studies on the topic of visual aesthetics and narrative of video games in Russian. The Russian-language segment of Game studies is mainly concentrated around the philosophy and psychology of video games. This is explained by the specialization of researchers who took part in the development and popularization of the discipline in the last decade (Alexander Vetushinsky, Alexey Salin, Leonid Moizhes, Pavel Rodkin, Maxim Podvalny, Konstantin Ocheretyany, Vladislav Kirichenko, Polina Khanova, etc.). This study proposes to introduce into local discourse a modern view of video game narrative as a multifaceted and unique phenomenon. This problem is important in a situation of rapid development of the computer games industry, as well as close attention from various actors who were not previously interested in this area, for example, film studios, media corporations and businesses.

The 20th century gave birth to many new, sometimes controversial practices, which, although not immediately, gradually found their audience. Video art, performance, various types of digital art and a number of other areas have captured not only the imagination of artists, but also the attention of viewers. In the second half of the twentieth century, video games firmly entered the arsenal of creative industries and became a new format of modern media. Today, the industry is creating a unique experience that absorbs current trends, and at the same time relies on a powerful interdisciplinary research base. In the gaming space, a special nature of subject-object connections is observed: the player becomes not only a researcher of the virtual world, but also an active creator, capable of building a new communication system and a network of semantic connections. Quite legitimate questions arise. How to differentiate storytelling methods based on interactive narrative? What components does the aesthetics of a video game consist of and what approaches can there be to studying it? How to actualize the

possibilities of storytelling through a virtual gaming environment? What is the mutual influence of reality and the virtual world?

Every year, the growing potential and authority of video games are becoming more visible and attractive beyond amateurs and professionals. The greatest interest in the new direction is shown by large corporations, including transnational corporations, show business and representatives of the film industry. Everyone finds a unique benefit that is based on a certain aspect of the gaming industry. Companies such as *Google*, *Netflix*, *Amazon* are developing their own streaming and hosting services, paying attention to the gaming industry. Companies not previously associated with this area, such as *Coca-Cola* and *Kellogg's*, are sponsoring various projects, including investing in the development of e-sports. In 2014, *Microsoft*, whose production is based on software, acquired Mojang AB for 2.5 billion rubles, since the latter is the developer of one of the most popular indie games in history - *Minecraft*.

The growth of digital distribution also affects the development of genre diversity, especially in the environment of independent computer games, otherwise called indie games - projects that are implemented without additional funding from the publisher by small groups of people or individually. One such developer is Lucas Pope, who over the past eight years has created two successful projects that have received high critical acclaim: *Papers, Please*, which was filmed by directors Nikita Ordynsky and Lydia Tkach, and *The Return of the Obra Dinn*, which won two BAFTA awards in 2019. In addition, *Minecraft* is also a high-budget indie game, representing the sandbox genre, which is based on the ability to terraform and interact with the content of the world: textures, objects and other components. Genres interact with each other and mutual influence occurs: one game can belong to several genres at once. Also, games, due to their interactivity, have a set of different mechanics that undergo changes as a result of the transformation of the role of genre definition. This is best illustrated by the Full Motion Video genre, which originally defined projects using pre-created sequential video sequences. In the interactive movie *Life is Strange*, such inserts are used in conjunction with

direct control of the character, as well as with the implementation of different variations of dialogue - the ability to select the phrase that the hero will pronounce. A similar strategy can be found in many projects, such as Mass Effect and The Witcher. The development of genres contributes to the creation of a wide variety in the market, from which the player is able to choose the project that suits his preferences and needs. Each genre has its own criteria, audience and samples, and therefore competition between developers becomes more urgent.

Research potential is revealed by representatives of various humanities: sociologists, cultural scientists, psychologists, philosophers, thereby reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of video games. In Russia, philosophy is at the forefront of research. In addition to the St. Petersburg LIKI mentioned at the beginning, a whole group of graduate students appeared at the Faculty of Philosophy, but already at Moscow University, some of whom later connected their careers specifically with video games. In 2013, they launched an elective course, Contemporary Media Theory and Metaphysics of Video Games. In 2014, they were joined by graduate students from other areas: religious studies, cultural studies, lawyers, philologists, and as a result, the Moscow Center for Video Game Research will be created. In 2015, Logos magazine dedicated a separate block of its 25th volume to game studies. The authors of this issue announced the formation of this research direction in Russia.

Around this time, a turning point in public perception of gaming occurred. They gradually entered the information field of Russians not only through the media, but also through the mediation of their own children, for whom the presence of a tablet has become virtually mandatory. The pandemic also played a role, as isolated people began to devote more and more time to virtual leisure: games and online cinemas. With the advent of the request, the demand expanded. In parallel with the process of popularizing video games, game design areas were opened in Russian universities, and young teachers were given the opportunity to teach their own courses in humanities departments. Thematic conferences, seminars, online courses arose, and a number of specialists and amateurs emerged who wish to

become, if not pioneers, then at least take part in the formation of a new discipline. The above determines the object and subject of research.

### **Scientific research apparatus**

**The object** of the research is video games with a complex construction of game narrative and virtual space.

**The subject** of the research is the aesthetics of the video game medium from the point of view of the player/viewer interacting with the interactive environment.

**The purpose** of the research is to identify different formats and approaches to video game aesthetics through the lens of visual narrative. Achieving this goal involves solving the following tasks:

- determine what the specifics of the video game environment are from the point of view of a transdisciplinary approach;

- identify defining criteria that can be included in the concept of “video game aesthetics”;

- study ludography objects for their setting and the specifics of its representation in an interactive environment;

- determine the specifics of video game aesthetics using the example of dialogue with the player;

- consider the possibility of analyzing the video game medium from the point of view of modern installation theory;

- study the textual nature of video game language as a result of the synthesis of arts.

**The research hypothesis** is that the aesthetics of video games hides significant media and scientific potential, which is, in our opinion, a determining factor for the creation of interactive environments - gaming, fictional and digital - thanks to which new types of virtual spaces will be able to offer viewers and

players a truly deep and varied visual and viewing experience. A polemical problem, in our opinion, is the correlation of the aesthetics of video games with exhibition, curatorial and spectator experience in modern cultural institutions. Comparing the player's optics and the viewer's optics as equivalent to each other most often ends in failure. But nevertheless, the mistake lies in the lack of understanding of the points of support that curators could focus on when creating exhibitions dedicated to video games, or using their medial features, which lie in the combination of interactivity, immersion and immanence. The above expands the possibilities of research approaches and the variety of tools for analyzing video games.

**The chronological scope** of the study covers the period from 2007 to the present. The lower time limit is due to the conditional beginning of the transitional stage in game design as a result of the release of the first game of the sci-fi media franchise Mass Effect, which became an iconic example of a new approach to the development of game narrative, as well as the release of the seventh generation PlayStation 3. There are also references to earlier projects outside the chronological framework due to the specifics of the development of the video game industry and storytelling. However, the bulk of the study focuses on more recent projects as well as video game series that fit the stated research topic. The popularization of the cross-platform Unity environment during this period, the emergence of new versions of the Unreal Engine and the active creation of their own game engines by studios allowed developers to use new tools to implement interesting concepts, which led to an increase in the number of products released, the growing popularity of the entertainment niche among users of all ages and the transformation of public opinions. In the 2010s, games increasingly began to be discussed in the media, arousing interest among psychologists and representatives of various disciplines, and even becoming topics for discussions and scandals in the public field.

**The structure of the dissertation** is determined by the purpose and objectives set by the author, and consists of an introduction, historiography, 3 chapters, a conclusion and a list of sources and literature, ludography.

### **Scientific novelty of the research**

1. For the first time, the aesthetics of video games becomes the main subject of research;
2. The role of visual codes in game texts and their interaction with the player's inner world is analyzed. A significant place in the work is given not only to theorizing the medial features of video games, but also to analyzing the potential of the content of video games. These research discourses have long been out of sight of scientists, both in Russia and abroad;
3. A comparison was made of multi-genre game projects from the perspective of a common setting, which for the first time is considered as a determining factor that forms a set of visual and narrative codes;
4. An analysis of video games is carried out as part of virtual artistic culture and the ability to form one's own language, the study of which is of wide interest for the humanities;
5. The gaming experience is considered through a combination of three characteristics: immanence, immersion and interactivity, which allows us to form the most accurate idea of the game as an object with aesthetic content;
6. It has been proven that video game aesthetics can be considered as an independent discipline, and the main approaches to its study have been identified;
7. Two potentials defining the aesthetics of video games are identified: scientific and medial;
8. It was revealed that video games can be interpreted as a form of media installation and their role for cultural institutions is substantiated.

Today, video games are present in one way or another in the life of every person,



acting as an independent medium. Due to immersiveness and novelty, the mediality of the gaming space creates a platform for numerous discussions. At the same time, the issues that are discussed can be very different. Quite fair questions arise: how promising is the study of new media in education, business and the entertainment industry? What are the implications of gaming aesthetics for the present and future of human culture? How important are media ecology issues today? In this regard, the formation of game design ethics is observed. The semiotic approach is also becoming an important factor today: a structural analysis of the complex system of semiotic signs and “meanings” that the logic of the game produces. The interdisciplinary nature of the study of video games initially implies their consideration from the point of view of not only technical, but also humanities. At the same time, the nature of the research will depend on many factors: setting, genre, style, history of the world, gameplay - the entire set of differences that structure the research potential of the discipline.

Not only the games can be different, but also the players. Personal life experience, emotional state, complexes, fears and dreams are the factors that construct the special psychology of perception of the world of video games in each individual case. Even the approach to studying the game itself may differ depending on what a particular researcher decides to focus on, what his gaming experience and range of interests are.

In this regard, the choice of research optics is critical. In Game studies, two approaches can be distinguished. On the one hand, there is game design, that is, game development. The very concept of “game designer” contains a focus on multitasking: this includes the construction of multi-level space, the architecture of game levels, the design of the topos and setting of the virtual world, and much more<sup>1</sup>. For example, developing a game script is not only about creating an overall storyline. This task is closely intertwined with the work on the game’s narrative as a holistic product, which means responsibility extends to the quality of side quests,

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<sup>1</sup> Toftedahl, M., Engström, H. A taxonomy of game engines and the tools that drive the industry. DiGRA 2019 Conference. P. 5

to the visual narrative of the game, and to its auditory design. The aesthetics of the space, and even the design of the game interface, can influence the player's overall perception of the entire plot of the game. According to art critic and theorist in the field of multimedia art Oliver Grau, "aesthetic experience does not occur in a situation where there is an image opposite the player as an object, leaving internal distancing possible in this case, it is formed in an artificially created, polysensory space of events, the suggestive potential of which evokes strong emotions, not least thanks to the engaging power of music."<sup>2</sup> And sometimes behind this work there is either one person or a whole team of specialists of various qualifications.

### **The elaboration degree of the topic**

The methodological basis of this discipline began to take shape in the 1990s. Being the intersection of game design, programming and narratology, over time, under the influence of other scientific discourses, it developed into a separate discipline - game studies, or ludology. An important moment in the history of the new field comes in 1990, when Dr. Irving Finkel organizes a colloquium at the British Museum, as a result of which the development of the IBGSA (International Board Game Study Association) program begins. Over time, the association attracts not only a narrow stratum of researchers, but also specialists from various fields: cultural scientists, game designers and art historians. However, video game research cannot be presented as a kind of universal theory, since even its object - ludus (Latin for game) - is not always the main direction of research.

Since the launch of the colloquium, it took approximately 15 years to form the basis and search for a methodology for future researchers. In subsequent years, game studies was popularized around the world by representatives of a variety of humanities disciplines. Research potential was identified by sociologists, cultural scientists, psychologists and representatives of other humanities and natural sciences, thereby reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of video games. In Russia, philosophy and psychology are at the forefront of research. Lacking a clearly

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<sup>2</sup> Grau, Oliver. Emotion and immersion: Key elements of visual research. - SPb.: Eidos. 2013. - P. 39

articulated epistemology, these disciplines take different approaches to the study of video games, which is due to the research lens of each specialist. Despite this, narrative theory represents a much more structured scientific material and can serve as a scientific matrix for analyzing the specifics of interactive storytelling.

This work is primarily an exploration of video game aesthetics, seeking to understand how video games, by harnessing the power of transdisciplinarity, narrative design, storytelling, and gameplay, shape new media formats and unique gaming experiences. According to the American philosopher Thi Nguyen, author of the book *Games: Agency As Art*, if fiction is a narrative-descriptive form for describing events, fine art is a visual form that includes inspection and seeing, music is a form of listening, then games are a practical form in which information is obtained through interaction<sup>3</sup>. And although the language of video games is primarily focused on interactivity and gameplay, the aesthetics of virtual gaming spaces occupy a phenomenal place in the perception of the game. Video game aesthetics is a subsection of game studies, a discipline with many faces that does not have a specific approach to the analysis of the object. In addition to the aesthetics of video games, the following main research strategies can be distinguished in game studies:

1. Narrative design and narratology - the study and organization of storytelling in all its manifestations;
2. Game design is the process of creating the form and content of gameplay;
3. Level design - designing engaging and understandable levels that can meet the game goal;
4. Video game history is a discipline that focuses on the past and present of the video game medium, its chronology and transformations;
5. Video game culture - the study of the characteristics of communication and forms of interaction between players in a virtual environment;
6. Philosophy of video games is an exploration of the medial nature of video games in the context of critical theories and contemporary culture.

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<sup>3</sup> C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art*. — New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. — p. 18

Of course, there are other areas of video game research, one of which is the aesthetics of video games, the analysis of which is the subject of this study. Incorporating the main developments that exist in game studies, video game aesthetics focuses on the study of virtual space, the gaming environment and communication with the player. The object of interest for the researcher may be interactive design, transdisciplinary intersections, cultural reminiscences, game setting - all elements that form the aesthetics of a particular game world.

First of all, it should be emphasized that in this work we are analyzing the aesthetics of video games from a scientific research point of view; game design and game production are not part of our area of interest. Establishing the differences between these practices is of paramount importance, especially when we are talking not about game rules, but about game artifacts<sup>4</sup>. The famous game researcher and religious scholar Leonid Moizhes rightly noted: “Game studies is not a theory of game design, the purpose of this discipline is the study of games, not their creation.”<sup>5</sup> This is facilitated by a transdisciplinary approach to the study of video game aesthetics, in which disciplines such as philosophy, narratology, visual semiotics or game design are not considered as areas that necessarily intersect in the space of one game. The concept of transdisciplinarity, to which we appeal in our dissertation research, is much broader than the structure of interdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is always about overcoming the framework of traditional disciplines and entering new areas of knowledge by strengthening classical subject epistemology. It is impossible, for example, to take only the methods of philosophy and psychology to explain how the gaming experience works. The interaction of the two disciplines will not be sufficient, since the gaming experience, firstly, is unique, and secondly, it is influenced by a whole variety of factors. In other words, scientific fields intersect with each other only formally, and the boundaries of these

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<sup>4</sup> Leino, O. T. Death loop as a feature. — *Game Studies*, 12(2), 2012 — p. 14

<sup>5</sup> Moizhes, L. Studying Video Games: What Game Studies is and Where It Comes From. URL: <https://dtf.ru/games/900229-izuchaya-videoigry-cto-takoe-game-studies-i-otkuda-oni-vzyalis> (access date: 11/10/2021)

intersections become indistinguishable. In this way, philosophy can be combined with theology and embodied in visual form in the format of a propaganda poster, which, in turn, contains references characteristic of the art historical and anthropological fields. In addition, both philological and cultural discourses are important in game studies. Therefore, the more carefully thought out the world is, the greater the potential of personal experience in understanding this space. In each new case it remains unique and is formed through three “I”:

- Immanence is a philosophical concept argued by representatives of poststructuralism, immanent philosophy and critical theory. According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, immanent experience is self-sufficient and capable of forming new references in the form of meanings and interpretations<sup>6</sup>. Referring in their work to Immanuel Kant, who emphasized the special role of immanent experience in the emergence of philosophical concepts, the authors emphasize that Edmund Husserl influenced the development of the concept of immanence to a greater extent. In his view, internal perception accompanies all acts of consciousness as self-consciousness. This means that any object or phenomenon goes through subjective reflection. This reflection is based on the experience of each individual person, is subject to immanent temporality, and has unstable and unchanging units<sup>7</sup>. Subjectivism, and in connection with it existentialism and the concept of interpretation, are also explored in the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Susan Sontag, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, many of whose ideas refer in different ways to the experience of personal experience. In video games, immanence should be defined as a sensory subjective experience. The immanent nature of the gaming experience brings to the fore the individual reading, rather than the author's text, which emphasizes the decisive role of the player;
- Immersion is a characteristic of an environment that reacts to the player's

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, J., Guattari F. What is philosophy? - St. Petersburg: Aletheia, 1998. - P. 182

<sup>7</sup> Husserl E. Cartesian reflections. - St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2001. - p. 50

actions and creates an illusory sense of the reality of what is happening in the virtual world. The presence of immersion provides the player with the opportunity to feel like part of another reality;

- Interactivity is the ability to interact with the gaming space not only using peripheral devices and form factors, such as gloves, virtual and augmented reality helmets, and a mouse, but also through the virtual environment itself, which is open to interaction with the player.

Hungarian researcher Chenge Tóth<sup>8</sup> noted that true interactivity in video games occurs not only in the relationship between the player and the game, but also between the players and between the player and the developer. Although interactivity is possible only during the game, this does not mean that interpretation and comprehension of its internal content should occur exclusively through interaction with space: the only important thing is that if comprehension cannot be connected with personal gaming experience, we cannot talk about a full-fledged analysis. Espen Aarseth views<sup>9</sup> games as two-layer objects that consist of mechanics, or game structure (code, physical, game rules) and semiotics, or game world, which includes audio, text, visual and other content. Their connection with each other gives rise to gameplay - a game as a process. Therefore, when exploring video game aesthetics, direct visual contact and interaction with the game world and its mechanics is important. There is a concept of ludosis, which was proposed by the Finnish video game researcher Frans Meire: semiosis is the generation of meaning through the interpretation of signs and symbols, which was actively developed by Yuri Lotman<sup>10</sup>, and ludosis is the generation of meaning through the process of interaction with the game and understanding of game situations<sup>11</sup>. If we talk about the game as an aesthetic space, then it would be appropriate to talk about any processes that contribute to the organization of the game as a system through which players carry out reflective interactions. Video game researcher Simon

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<sup>8</sup> Tóth, Cs. Video games in relation to art — Budapest Metropolitan University, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Aarseth, E. Defi ne Real, Moron! Some Remarks on Game Ontologies — in DIGAREC Keynote-Lectures 2009/10, Potsdam: Potsdam University Press, 2011 — p. 59

<sup>10</sup> Lotman, Yu. M. Articles on semiotics and topology of culture. Volume 1. - Tallinn: "Alexandra", 1992. - p. 11-25

<sup>11</sup> Mäyrä, F. An introduction to game studies: games in culture — London: SAGE, 2009. — 196 p.

Niedenthal in 2009 identified<sup>12</sup> three parameters characteristic of the aesthetic direction:

1. Emphasis on sensory phenomena that the player encounters in the game (auditory, visual, tactile, bodily);
2. Interaction of video games with other forms of art;
3. Expressed experience during the game: pleasure, expression of emotions, sociability - obtaining an “aesthetic experience”.

It is important to note that games are a product that is primarily focused on successful and profitable sale. This focus among developers is justified: due to the enormous costs of financial and human resources, most AAA-projects<sup>13</sup> cannot afford to fail. This, for example, leads to crunch, which Jason Schreyer writes<sup>14</sup> about in detail in his book about the gaming industry.

The body of Russian-language scientific works on the topic of aesthetics of the video game medium is small, but is actively developing, attracting the attention of architects, art historians and game designers.

### **Theoretical foundations of the research**

According to an interview with Russian philosopher and video game researcher Alexander Vetushinsky<sup>15</sup>, games have traditionally been studied within the framework of old media: books, magazines, newspapers and television. The situation changed radically with the advent of public computers. Since then, the study of games has become part of the study of digital, that is, computer media. In the early 1990s, games began to be studied within the framework of narratology, the tradition of which is very strong in European countries. According to this approach, cultural objects are regarded directly as texts: be it a film, a television program, a sculpture or an advertising poster - all this is a specially constructed text. In this case, reality is textual and symbolic, and therefore can be read and

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<sup>12</sup> Niedenthal, S. What We Talk About When We Talk About Game Aesthetics — DiGRA 2009 Conference — p. 2

<sup>13</sup> An informal term for video games that have a high development budget comparable to that of a blockbuster movie.

<sup>14</sup> Schreyer, J. Blood, sweat and pixels. The other side of the industry. — Moscow: Bombora, 2019. — 368 p.

<sup>15</sup> Lenta. Science and technology [Electronic resource]. — Access mode: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/01/03/gamification/> (date accessed 04/22/20)

interpreted. In this case, games can be considered as a specially organized text in which narrative plays a key role.

Today, this approach should be considered only as one of the possible ones, since there are too many disagreements and different points of view among not only video game researchers, but also game designers themselves. Moreover, unlike the same painting in the museum, video games do not actually exist without the person who plays them - the player, who also becomes one of the actors in the process of perceiving and interpreting the game. And this actor is no less influential than the developer himself: communities of players are able to influence the rating of the game, and therefore the income of its creators.

The transdisciplinary approach, used as the main tool for analyzing the game text, is based on the study of a large corpus of materials and sources included in the bibliography of modern and classical art, philosophy, cultural studies, narrative theory, comparative mythology, psychology, media studies, studies of video games and game aesthetics, and sociology. This integrative methodology for analyzing narrative design and the specifics of storytelling in video games allowed us to expand the research lens and look at the text from a panoramic point of view.

The basic work that is considered in the course of the study can be called the work of Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, published in 1938. Despite the controversial relevance of some judgments, this work is the first significant work of the 20th century, the author of which turned his attention to the game as a cultural phenomenon. Huizinga described the classification of play functions as follows: "Play is the struggle for something or the display of something. Both functions can be combined, so that the game "shows" a struggle for something or turns into a competition to see who can show something better than others."<sup>16</sup> In other words, it can be interpreted as active and passive play, where "fight" is competition and "show" is demonstration. Sometimes these two forms can be combined, and the author gives, according to him, the simplest example: a child who imagines himself as a prince, a tiger, or whatever. During the game, he

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<sup>16</sup> Huizinga J. *Homo Ludens*; *Articles on the history of culture*. — M.: Progress – Tradition. 1997. - P. 31.



experiences a strong belief that he is the object of his fantasy and relates himself to the fictional “I”, but at the same time is fully aware of the surrounding reality. This is one of the key points of the work, which directly refers to the theory of interactive narrative, where the player and his imagination come to the fore, and not just a given storyline. One of the main ideas of the work is that the game cannot be classified as a cultural phenomenon, but rather the opposite - culture is a consequence of the existence of the game. Huizinga justifies this by the fact that play, in its archaic context, is observed in animals. Thus, we can conclude that gaming has always been an important part of culture - we are talking not only about ancient board games such as dice or cards, but also about the playful nature of rituals, feasts, sacred dances and even sports. Philosopher and sociologist Roger Caillois, as a result of a critical understanding of *Homo ludens*, comes to the conclusion that play, in its entirety, should be considered as a voluntary activity, a source of joy and fun, and also writes that “this activity is essentially isolated, carefully isolated from the rest life and usually carried out within a strictly defined time and space framework.”<sup>17</sup>

*In In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*<sup>18</sup>, contemporary media scholar Gordon Calleja examines two types of engagement: immersion as absorption and immersion as transference. In his understanding, the first is equivalent to psychological involvement in the process. Such a connection is one-way, where the player is not able to influence the game space, but it influences him. Calleja defines the second type of immersiveness as a feeling of being transported to another reality and implies that in this case the player is transported into the game space with the help of a game avatar and is able to conduct two-way interaction with the surrounding virtual world. In other words, the gameplay is structured in such a way that the world reacts to the player’s actions, creating an illusory sense of the reality of what is happening, which opens up the opportunity to feel part of another reality. However, Gordon Calleja was not a pioneer: several

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<sup>17</sup> Caillois, R. *Games and people. Articles and essays on the sociology of culture.* — Moscow: AST Publishing House, 2022 — p. 45-46

<sup>18</sup> Calleja, G. *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*, USA, The MIT Press. 2011. — P. 23

years earlier, the topic of immersion in the digital world and video games had already been considered from different angles. Janet Horowitz Murray defines immersion as the experience of being transported into a carefully crafted environment in which the recipient's attention is absorbed by a fictional reality that influences different modes of perception<sup>19</sup>. Alison McMahan argues that video games with a special virtual environment are also capable of a similar level of involvement<sup>20</sup>. Marie-Laure Ryan describes immersion as a more general category, defining it as the feeling of moving consciousness into a fictional world<sup>21</sup>. Laura Ermi and France Mayra propose to differentiate immersion by its perceptual triggers (sensory), creative, and challenge-provoked<sup>22</sup>. Jan-Noël Thon supports this concept and proposes to distinguish between spatial, ludic, narrative and social immersiveness<sup>23</sup>.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, the analysis of video game aesthetics and the phenomenon of intertext is mainly carried out using the example of dystopian settings, cyberpunk, the magical Middle Ages and its intersection with Slavic folklore. One of the sources for analyzing the visual code of dystopias was the article by Markus Schulzke *The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias*<sup>24</sup>. According to her, video game storytelling can act as a platform for social criticism. As an engaged medium, dystopian gaming can create worlds in which the view of dystopian institutions and ideologies can be conveyed more effectively than in similar media. The text also contains the idea that a video game narrative in such a setting is capable of creating a unique aesthetic and containing visually encoded information. Through their study, the player is drawn into the internal structure of

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<sup>19</sup> Murray, J. Hamlet on the Holodeck. *The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1997. — P. 98

<sup>20</sup> McMahan, A. Immersion, Engagement, and Presence. A Method for Analyzing 3-D Video Games. In M. J. P. Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.): *The Video Game Theory Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2003 — P. 68

<sup>21</sup> Ryan, M.-L. *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2001 — P. 10

<sup>22</sup> Ermi, L. & Mäyrä, F. Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion. In *Proceedings of Digra 2005: Changing Views – Worlds in Play*. Retrieved September 1, 2006. URL: <http://www.gamesconference.org/digra2005/viewpaper.php?id=267&print=1> (accessed: 21.08.2023)

<sup>23</sup> Thon, Jan-Noël. Immersion Revisited. On the Value of a Contested Concept. — In: Amyris Fernandez/Olli Leino/Hanna Wirman (Hg.): *Extending Experiences. Structure, Analysis and Design of Computer Game Player Experience*. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press, 2008. — P. 39.

<sup>24</sup> Schulzke, Marcus. *The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias*. Games and Culture. 2014. — P. 1-20

the world, the study of which can give him an answer to the reasons for such a world order.

With the choice of a dystopian setting, the question arose about the possibility of classifying cyberpunk as a dystopian narrative. Being closely associated with anarchy and capitalism, which is not always the object of the narrative in classic dystopias, where order and legalized equality between people reign, cyberpunk is rich in visual codes. The final decision to include cyberpunk in the concept of dystopia was influenced by David Seed's text *Cyberpunk and Dystopia: Pat Cadigan's Networks*<sup>25</sup>. In this work, cyberpunk is classified as a second wave of dystopias and is one of the ideological continuations of the genre.

One of the main themes that arises in dystopian worlds is intimate relationships. Often they are controlled by the state, or partially taboo, but one way or another, sexual relations and self-identification are important moments in the development of characters and plots. This unspoken rule comes from classic dystopian works. In them, the main characters, mostly men, play by the rules of the world until they fall in love with a woman. The woman acts as one of the triggers that forces the hero to break the rules. A woman, speaking on the side of the opposition, "opens the eyes" of the hero to the real state of affairs. Jane Donavert, in her essay *Genre Blending and the Critical Dystopia*<sup>26</sup>, discusses the tendency to blur the boundaries between genres, and notes that a number of dystopian stories feature themes of gender role inversion, sexuality, and family formation. This raises the question: how are such themes visually represented in video games, and what is the role of self-identity and partner choice?

The theoretical basis of the study was compiled from the works of domestic and foreign authors who examined various aspects of the study of video games: their philosophy, historical context, methodology, historical and social significance. The works of authors directly related to game design and manifestos

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<sup>25</sup> Seed, David. "Cyberpunk and Dystopia: Pat Cadigan's Networks" in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. Routledge, New York, 2003. — P. 69-91

<sup>26</sup> Donawerth, Jane. "Genre Blending and the Critical Dystopia" in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. Routledge, New York, 2003. — P. 29-47

of video game developers were also studied. One important researcher is Ian Bogost, who systematized the levels of consideration of video games and substantiated the concept of the space of possibilities: the space of communication between the player and the developer, which significantly distinguishes video games from other media due to the ability of players to participate in the process<sup>27</sup>.

The study used the method of comparative analysis, which is impossible to do without when studying video games. The semiotic method also plays an important role, since the visual and narrative elements of video games are perceived as communication components that can act as signs, find addressees and contain linguistic and cultural codes. Virtual narrative is not just a plot, a script, or a special way of telling a story. It can be defined as a complex phenomenon, a special form of communication between the player and the game, the developer, the space and the embodied idea. This phenomenon is influenced by various factors: from game design and game genre to public opinion and immersion. Appealing to different genres and settings in order to identify patterns, similarities and differences in the context of interactive narrative would be impossible without descriptive analysis, which helped to compare various elements and find points of common ground and similarities. Additionally, the task of identifying common and different elements in similar settings was solved thanks to the longitudinal method - dystopian stories are considered from the point of view of the transformation of semantic and visual accents in the narrative over the past decades.

In *Columbian Nightmare: Narrative, History, and Nationalism in BioShock Infinite*<sup>28</sup>, Stefan Schubert writes about the video game as an interactive environment in which the player exists within the game to function as text himself. This is an important point for understanding the visual features of game worlds, where the narrative is built not only for the sake of gameplay. A large place in the virtual space is given to the world itself: how it is structured, what elements

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<sup>27</sup> Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive games. The expressive power of videogames*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007. 464 p.

<sup>28</sup> Schubert, Stefan. *Columbian Nightmare: Narrative, History, and Nationalism in BioShock Infinite*. FIAR — 2018 — Vol. 11.2. — P. 44-60

designers pay attention to, and what kind of dialogue the space has with the player. This question can be resolved both by direct analysis of works from the ludography list, and by conducting surveys and carefully reading relevant studies, in which the subject of research becomes the specifics of the narrative of a particular project.

Another problem that required special attention was thinking about the philosophy of in-game space and its ability to self-reflect: not from the point of view of neural networks or artificial intelligence, but from the point of view of understanding the linguistic structure of the world as a space that can involve the player in communication. This space, being conflicting, contradictory and capable of raising sensitive topics, a priori cannot statically tell a linear story. After all, thanks to interactivity, the player essentially creates a unique text almost himself. The need to delve into this issue was inspired by Tom Moylan's book *Scraps Of The Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*<sup>29</sup>, in which the author provides a colossal analysis of the dystopian/utopian plot. A detailed examination of classical dystopia, which, according to the author, begins with Edward Foster and Yevgeny Zamyatin, and his further analysis of modern examples, contributed to a better understanding of the issue.

The theme of alienation lies at the heart of many dystopian narratives, and is also relevant for the video game medium. The clash between the aforementioned cyberpunk genre and alienation inevitably raises the issue of transhumanism and its critique, as well as social and class differences. Vladimir Kutyrev also draws attention to human imperfection, orientation toward the social, and technical modifications of a biological organism in his work “Minerva’s Owl Flies at Twilight.”<sup>30</sup>

It is worth noting that a wide range of Eastern European researchers are studying the theme of a dystopian society, which comes not only from an interest in the genre, but also from futurophobia. The dystopian genre itself carries a

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<sup>29</sup> Moylan, T. *Scraps Of The Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (1st ed.). — NY: Routledge, 2000. — 408 p.

<sup>30</sup> Kutyrev, V.A. *The Owl of Minerva flies into the twilight (Selected philosophical texts of the 21st century)*. - St. Petersburg: Aletheia, 2018 - p. 147

powerful preventive narrative, which is perceived not only as entertainment for the mind, but also carries a warning message. These stories tell us what utopian projects lead to and how terrible the dictatorship that lies at the heart of most dystopias can be. A number of texts written by M. Chernyak, I. Danilevsky, L. Denisova, T. Grishenkova and A. Chernyaeva, Yu. Zhadanov and a whole galaxy of other authors are devoted to the study of these problems in Russian and Eastern European science.

### **Main results of the research and thesis statements**

The introduction and the first chapter of the dissertation explain the terminology used in the future, internal chronology, reveal the essence of the transdisciplinary approach in the analysis of specific projects that are directly related to the study, touch upon such terms as textuality, intertextuality, metatext, architectonics of the game narrative, and also provide a theoretical matrix for understanding of modern video game concepts. In the process of the study, an analysis of the morphology of polyphonic narrative was proposed with a focus on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, to whom he wrote: “After all, dialogical relations are a much broader phenomenon than the relations between the replicas of a compositionally expressed dialogue, this is an almost universal phenomenon that permeates all human speech and all relationships , and manifestations of human life, in general, everything that has meaning and significance.”<sup>31</sup> An evidentiary conclusion was substantiated that the space of a video game is capable of conducting a visual dialogue through an interactive narrative. The polemical and communicative nature of the space produces truly vivid emotions, which allows the player not only to “go through the plot”, but also to learn something new about himself. Using the example of the game *Disco Elysium*, it was demonstrated that the term “polyphonic” reflects a polyphonic gaming environment or a game as a metatext - a virtual text that, through interactivity, involves the player in the

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<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin M. Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics. Collected works in seven volumes. Volume VI. - Moscow: Languages of Slavic culture, 2002. - p. 51

narrative, evokes empathy and self-reflection.

Additionally, video games have been analyzed as a form of media installation. Here, the main inspiration for the new concept of organizing the play space was the monograph by art historian Claire Bishop “Installation Art”<sup>32</sup>. In our opinion, three-dimensional gaming spaces have their own exhibition logic and play a key role in creating an atmosphere. Since most of this atmosphere is experienced by the player through direct contact with the virtual world, this experience is unique and difficult to interpret. Claire Bishop mentions a quote from American installation artist Robert Irwin from *Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists*, in which he discusses why any mediation or attempt to explain an installation fails: “The interaction between art and viewer is a direct experience, which belongs entirely to the current moment, and there is no way to transmit it to you through any secondary system.” The player, as a direct participant in the process, is not only involved in constructing the plot, but also reads the meanings, empathizes, comprehends the narrative, passing it through himself. For the most part, players, due to a number of factors, perceive the filling of locations as an element of procedural rhetoric. Ian Bogost wrote about this, emphasizing the fact of interaction between players and elements of the world that they do not properly notice, but are influenced by. However, whether it is the city of Hanamura from the game *Overwatch 2*, which is a collective image of Japanese urban space, or the looping corridor from the unreleased horror *P.T.* — each of these spaces can be considered as a full-fledged virtual installation. Video games can be both intimate spaces with a laconic plot, and complex worlds with an abundance of storylines. Games like *Minecraft* or *Valheim*, which allow you to independently shape the gaming space, reach a new level and provide the player with the opportunity to independently construct a virtual world. With the advent of the ability to create, the player carries out an act of creation in the game itself, and therefore constructs his own narrative in the fictional world.

By expanding the concept of game narrative, the study raises the question

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<sup>32</sup> Бишоп К. Искусство инсталляции. — М.: Ad Marginem Press. 2022 — 192 с.

of the functioning of interactive storytelling in contact with reality. An important aspect of research attention is the process of mutual influence of the real and virtual worlds and the problem of integrating the virtual world into our everyday life through gamification and metaverses.

### **Thesis statements:**

1. It has been established that interactive storytelling expands the capabilities of video games as a medium, opening up new formats of interpretation in the context of metatextual narrative;
2. It has been revealed that the philosophy of in-game space is key to understanding the linguistic structure of the world as an organized space that can engage the player in dialogue. This space, being conflicting and contradictory, a priori cannot tell a linear story. Indeed, due to interactivity, the player actually recreates the text on his own, even if he follows the logic of the plot;
3. It has been proven why the medial nature of a video game is not determined by forced didactic material, but is focused on reflection and immanent experience;
4. A hypothesis is formulated that video games can be interpreted as a form of media installation.

### **Theoretical significance of the research**

A key feature of video game research has become an integrated approach not only to theoretical, but also to creative and practical processes - it is designated in the work as transdisciplinary. With it, different areas of knowledge, from medieval studies to narrative design, are not considered as directly intersecting. The difference from interdisciplinary is that if “inter-” contains a certain line “between” disciplines, then “trans” is something on top, something outside, where disciplines intersect, but do not determine the research itself. This means that it is impossible to take the methods of anthropology and visual semiotics to explain how the game



experience works - their intersection will not be enough, since the experience is unique and influenced by many components of the game aesthetics. The transdisciplinary approach, used as the main tool for analyzing the game text, is based on the study of a large corpus of materials and sources included in the bibliography of modern and classical art, philosophy, cultural studies, narrative theory, comparative mythology, psychology, media studies, studies of video games and game aesthetics, and sociology.

In addition, discourses play an important role in Game studies. Therefore, the more carefully thought out the world is, the greater the potential of personal experience in understanding this space. In each new case, it remains unique and is formed through three "I": immanence, immersion, and interactivity. In this regard, another problem that required special attention was the question of the philosophy of in-game space and its ability to self-reflect. Not from the point of view of neural networks or artificial intelligence, but from the point of view of understanding the linguistic structure of the world, as a space that can involve the player in communication. This space, being conflicting, contradictory and capable of raising sensitive topics, a priori cannot statically tell a linear story. After all, thanks to interactivity, the player essentially creates a unique text almost himself.

This world may have its own visual and semantic rules, which are organized by the setting - a meta-layering of meanings that best reveals the transdisciplinary nature of game storytelling. When designing an interactive narrative, developers are faced with the task of creating not just text, but text, which in a number of projects can take the form of metatext - virtual text organized in such a way that, with the help of interactivity, it involves the player in the narrative, evokes empathy and is oriented toward reflection. The world of a computer game itself acts as a text, capable of illustrating parts of its own story without words. And the main difference here is interactivity - the player independently moves through a visually rich world and makes decisions, takes control of the character. This is how a phenomenon occurs, which in the work was defined as reading meanings. It comes from the concept of decoding - the interpretation of a text that brings the reader closer to

understanding its constituent parts. Reading is giving the text a meaning that is not originally contained in it. In this way, interactive storytelling expands the capabilities of the video game as a medium, opening up the possibility of interpretation through metatextual narrative.

One of the primary values when studying the aesthetics of video games is also given to the setting. Three important elements of any setting (location, time period and specific aesthetic environment) in the context of the game, they are most often united by a common narrative. For example, in video games, the dystopian plot is revealed in a new way, acting more as a setting. It focuses on creating visual constructs. The need to give the virtual world a unified appearance that will reflect the world order not only externally, but also internally, poses a difficult task for game designers. How to involve the player in the narrative and make them empathize with your hero? First of all, by using narrative.

### **Practical significance of the research**

The gaming environment located within the boundaries of the virtual world can be conceptualized as a modern form of media installation. In such projects, the player is able to devote time to searching for his identity within the virtual space. The perception of the game is seen as paramount and determines the perception of the game as a form of art, as in modern types of installations: both media and physical. In a similar way, from an installation point of view, many game projects can be described. Especially when we are talking about games with a certain virtual environment - setting. Like installations, they can only be treated as art through the lens of the viewing experience they offer.

Research into virtual aesthetics can come from the gaming environment as a space for the embodiment of artistic practices. These practices can be both in-game and beyond the gaming medium. This is how media intersections appear, in which video games collide with literature, cinema, comics and more. One of the most complex encounters of this type is the correlation of video game aesthetics with the process of exhibition, as well as curatorial and spectator experience in

modern cultural institutions. This also affects the fact that video games are used as an expressive form with which the viewer needs to interact, becoming a player. After all, the aesthetics of video games can not only be reproduced in a virtual project, but also try to transfer it into reality, taking it beyond the scope of a digital product. Such a transfer is not necessary - after all, video games, being residents of the virtual world, are independent in themselves and do not necessarily require going beyond the boundaries of artificial reality. The aesthetics of video games, fueled by modern trends, art, imagery and culture, remains a promising direction, the demand for which will only grow in the coming years, both in the context of the improvement and accessibility of computer capabilities, and within the framework of the development of metaverses.

### **Approbation of research results**

#### **Publications on the topics of the dissertation:**

Works published by the author in journals indexed in international indexing and citation databases, as well as in high-level managed journals of the Higher School of Economics:

1. Shibaev M.V. Painting through the prism of matching game space graphs // Communications. Media. Design. 2021. Volume 6. No. 4. P. 5-26.
2. Shibaev M.V. Visual codes of dystopia in video games: representation of social class differences // Communications. Media. Design. 2023. Volume 8. No. 3. P. 157-174.
3. Shibaev M.V. Disco Elysium: morphology of polyphonic narrative // Artikult. 2022. No. 3 (47). pp. 25-41.

#### **Other publications on the topics of the dissertation:**

1. Shibaev M.V. From the Virtual to the Real // V-A-C Sreda online magazine.  
URL: <https://sreda.v-a-c.org/en/read-36>

### **Conferences:**

The main provisions and conclusions of the dissertation research were manifested in the following provisions of the author:

1. International online conference of the National Research University Higher School of Economics "Aesthetics of good and evil in video games", report "Postmodern Fantasy in Comics and Video Games: Plot and Graphic continuity" (Moscow, National Research University Higher School of Economics, September 24, 2020)
2. XXVIII International Conference of Students, Postgraduate Students and Young Scientists "Lomonosov-2021", section "Cultural Policy and Management in the Humanitarian Sphere", report "Methods of Participation and Gamification of Modern Exhibition Space" (Moscow, Moscow State University, April 17, 2021)
3. International conference of the National Research University Higher School of Economics "Theories and practice of art and design: sociocultural, historical and political contexts", report "Virtual Graphics of the Gaming Space: From Graffiti to Painting" (Moscow, National Research University Higher School of Economics, April 21, 2021)
4. Yasinskaya (April) World Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development, section "Creative Industry: Development Prospects and Formational Strategies", media art, report "Visual Codes of Dystopia in Video Game Aesthetics" (Moscow, National Research University Higher School of Economics, April 6, 2023)

## 2. Main content of the research

This case study draws on issues of video game aesthetics within interdisciplinary research. When studying video games as a medium, an important place should be given to personal gaming experience, which can be based on both the passage of the main plot of the game, and more unique phenomena, as a result of which discrepancies may arise. They can be virtual gaming tourism, the use of gaming media as a creative method, the use of anthropological or ethnographic approaches in the study of virtual worlds and the study of the phenomenon of fixing certain, both philosophical and visual, aesthetics. Virtual tourism is based on exploring the game space outside the main storyline, taking screenshots and visually exploring the space in order to find hidden plots or immerse yourself in the aesthetics of the game. This approach is mainly applicable in games with open worlds. In a linear and closed space, gameplay limitations prevent players from fully exploring the internal rules by which the virtual world exists. However, such narratives contain many hidden semantic clues, “Easter eggs”<sup>33</sup> that allow one to comprehend the philosophy of in-game spaces both through allegories and comparisons, and through the game text.

The study of games in the context of visual culture suggests that video games can not only immerse the player in a new reality, but also act as complexly organized narratives. These narratives are largely in dialogue with the “real” reality surrounding the player. The choice of a dystopian setting as a gaming matrix contributes to a more revealing demonstration of how diverse, complex and at the same time structured and close to a person the gaming aesthetics of a certain topic can be. The focus primarily on one setting is justified by the fact that without the necessary research base and analysis of the internal content of various manifestations of dystopia in the narrative, it would be almost impossible to trace a single structure in the formation of dystopian worlds and its visual codes. Along the way, the analysis of dystopias was the subject of a longitudinal study to see whether, as the genre developed, narrative components and elements from the

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<sup>33</sup> A term used primarily in video games to refer to a work from another medium.

works of previous eras were preserved, and to what extent the ideas in these stories retain their relevance.

The dissertation research is devoted to the problem of perception of the aesthetics of the video game medium. The main object for analysis in the work is the interactive environment in which two optics - gaming and spectator - collide and interact with each other and with the surrounding virtual space. Visual-narrative design also occupies a significant place - a direction in the organization of the environment, virtual or real, which has existed in one form or another throughout human history. The history of art shows that from the moment a person arose the need to analyze and preserve his history, the need to create appropriate texts, stories or myths has been an integral part of culture. The word "text" in this work is used as part of narrative semiotics, the foundations of which are laid in the works of R. Barthes, Y. Kristeva, M. Foucault, W. Eco, Y. Lotman, J. Derrida - all those who stood at the origins of semiotics analysis and poststructuralism. Thus, any element of reality can be read and interpreted, and therefore can act as text<sup>34</sup>. Accordingly, visual-narrative design as an activity that consists of creating semantic texts is a more global human invention that exists outside the framework of the theory of video game development.

The above determines the main representative research strategies: an appeal to the aesthetics of video games in the context of game studies, an analysis of the potential of visual codes in game texts. These research discourses have long been out of sight of scientists, both in Russia and abroad. Video games, as part of virtual artistic culture, are closely related to cinema, literature and art in general, but are also capable of forming their own language, the study of which is of wide interest for the humanities. The transdisciplinary approach, used as the main tool for analyzing the game text, is based on the study of a large corpus of materials and sources included in the bibliography of modern and classical art, philosophy, cultural studies, narrative theory, comparative mythology, psychology, media studies, studies of video games and game aesthetics, and sociology. This integrative

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<sup>34</sup> Derrida, J. On grammatology. - M: Ad Marginem, 2000. - P. 238

methodology for analyzing narrative design and the specifics of storytelling in video games allowed us to expand the research lens and look at the text from a panoramic point of view.

The first chapter of the study is devoted to the aesthetics of video games and the definition of a thesaurus of concepts and key terms used in the work, as well as an exploration of their role and place in the game setting. The starting point was the analysis of the structure of the gaming experience and the strategy of intersection of text-centric and visual foundations in it, which determines the specifics of certain settings and genres in the game narrative.

In the second chapter of the study, the focus is on the actual aesthetics of video games from the point of view of visual-narrative logic in the design of the gaming environment. Using the example of two illustrative settings - dystopia and the magical Middle Ages - in which great importance is given not only to the external, but also to the figurative, allegorical content of the virtual language, it is demonstrated how the setting contributes to the creation of a certain semantic field.

The third chapter updates the innovative approach to the gaming medium as a new, virtual form of installation by comparing the work and ideas of installation artists with video game projects. The most important part of this chapter is the analysis of the artistic potential of gaming spaces, the possibility of exiting and borrowing the gaming aesthetics of the virtual world in real and medial intersections.

### 3. Conclusion

The study touches on three large themes, each of which can be thought of independently, but nevertheless are inextricably united in the work within the aesthetics of the video game medium. Being decisive, the spectator and game optics are combined in the interactive environment in one person - the face of a specific player, discipline or approach, each of which will have its own unique view when confronted with the virtual environment. The view on video game aesthetics proposed in the study can help not only game developers in creating better spaces, but also curators of cultural institutions and exhibition projects, who in their work can take the installation logic of the video game medium as a basis.

Due to the expansion of the potential of computers, a number of professions are no longer thought of only in terms of physical reality, because a separate space has opened up for them, which is eager for development. In the era of digitalization, not only the Internet, but also, unexpectedly, video games have taken the forefront. Today, their potential continues to grow, which attracts more and more specialists from various fields to the gaming industry. The consequence of this was that the gaming industry, like many areas of human activity, quickly became commercialized. Initially, this special market was ideologically close to the mass market. For example, one of the most popular trends in the early days of the industry was copying successful models and gameplay mechanics. This specificity was understandable: the developers of the new product, which had achieved incredible popularity by the mid-80s, were reluctant to invest in experiments. Echoes of this trend in the industry still exist: interesting mechanics migrate from one game to another, are rethought and integrated into the setting. After a brief golden age for computer arcade games that began in the late 70s and lasted until the mid-80s, the market crashed in 1983. And a new dawn has arrived for the industry. The development of personal computers and technological innovations have modernized not only video games, but also the entire human life, of which the gaming industry and technological breakthroughs have now become integral parts. This also led to changes in the attitude towards video games from



various sciences - they began to pay attention to the medium, which had previously been considered only within the framework of studies of other media and computers.

This work also analyzed the representation of the internal content of the game narrative. The responsible implementation of this task is supervised by the game designer with the help of visual codes, the basis of which can be laid not only in literature and cinema, but also in the philosophy of the virtual world and even reality itself. Thus, in a dystopian setting, through the connection between space and its philosophy, a set of key problems relevant to the chosen world is determined. For example, the embodiment of illusory and mythical power in all spheres of human life or poverty as the collapse of a utopian idea. The narrative about power as a dominant force helps characters realize themselves and lays out the psychologism of situations. In turn, the use of architectural solutions and virtual graphics helps to reflect the internal ideology of the world through its external appearance. Game images are filled with ideological propaganda, and the closed nature of the system, from which people cannot or do not want to escape, contributes to the creation of the best atmosphere for maintaining inequality: those locked in this state evoke sympathy, futuristic fears and provoke conflict between the text and the reader. Drawing inspiration from the world around them, virtual space creators visualize themes of discrimination and class struggle using a range of visual patterns. Each of them represents a semantic code that can be transmitted from story to story. Artistic reminiscence and the search for prototypes play an important role in this, because any art is just a reproduction of already existing images. Consequently, the medial nature of video games does not so much convey meanings as it motivates the player to engage in dialogue. This means that the interactive narrative does not work with forced didactic material, but with the reflection and inner world of the player.