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HAZARDS OF VIRTUALIZATION: ABJECTION AND IMMERSION IN CYBERPUNK 2077

Kulcsszavak: virtualizáció; eszképizmus; abjekt; identitáskrízis; posztmodern

Through understanding the process of postmodernity as a transitional period, this paper explores the representation of the postmodern identity crisis within CD Projekt Red's video game Cyberpunk 2077, which is contrasted with Heiner Müller's drama Hamletmachine, through the theory of the semiotics of the subject. Focusing on Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, the analysis examines how these works reflect on their respective cultural paradigm shifts and represent the changing tendencies regarding the constitution of the socially positioned human subject. Hamletmachine establishes Hamlet as a self-conflicting subject within a postmodern framework and introduces, while Cyberpunk 2077 immerses players in an interactive narrative that challenges their socially defined subject positions. Thus, starting out from an interpretation of the play that thematizes the character type as a manifestation of epistemological and cultural uncertainties, the analysis interprets the game's protagonist as the typical Hamlet-character. Drawing on the interplay between escapism (understood as a coping strategy) and abjection, the analysis of the game identifies a shift where the virtual world and the machine become the primary aspects of identification, pushing "real life" into an abject position. Through this lens, Cyberpunk 2077 reflects on the themes of identity, subjectivity, and virtualization, which in turn reveals the dangerous tendency of immersive digital spaces to alienate players from reality, showing the double nature of escapism that can function both as a healing mechanism and a potential source of existential detachment. Ultimately, the paper highlights how Cyberpunk 2077 addresses the dissolution of traditional categories (e. g. the human, social roles) and the unsettling effects of postmodern virtualization. As a result, I maintain that the video game can function as a critical and instructive depiction of escapism and virtualization, since it reflects on the postmodern identity crisis and warns of the dangerous cultural and societal tendencies of seeking validation and purpose within digital spaces, which can lead to stagnation, personal decline, or even suicide. By inviting players to critically interact with these tendencies, the game transcends its fictional world to pose questions about identity, agency, and the shifting boundaries between the real and the virtual, which are analogous with the changing cultural frameworks of the abject and the subject.