

Disco Elysium: Voices and Thoughts. A brief overview of Skill Voices and The Thought Cabinet

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ABSTRACT: The article aims to investigate the use of internal voices of the skills as a means of constructing and conveying identity. By analyzing the narrative mechanisms and player interactions, this study explores the roles of the voices as narrative agents influencing character development and the player's perception alongside the role of the Thought Cabinet.

KEYWORDS: skills; voices; mind; internalized; thoughts.

TITLUL: „Disco Elysium: Voci și Gânduri – o scurtă prezentare generală a Abilităților vocale și a Cabinetului de Gânduri”

REZUMAT: Articolul își propune să investigheze folosirea vocilor interne ale puterilor în calitate de mijloace de construcție și atribuire a identității. Analizând mecanismele narative și interacțiunile dintre jucători, prezentul studiu explorează rolurile vocilor drept agenți narativi ce influențează dezvoltarea personajelor și percepția jucătorului, alături de rolul Cabinetului de Gânduri.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: puteri; voci; minte; internalizat; gânduri.

The 2019 video game „Disco Elysium” has won multiple awards for its innovative narrative and gameplay style, notably winning four awards at The Game Awards in 2019¹. It features a rich narrative, a deeply involved skill tree, and character archetypes for the beginning of the game.

The game's skills will often dictate the player's actions and interactions with the game's story and are split into four branches: *Intellect*, *Psyche*, *Physique*, and *Motorics*.² The four branches create a distinct architecture for the main character, Harrier „Harry” Du Bois, as he awakens with temporary retrograde amnesia following nights of alcohol-induced debauchery. They assist in recreating the man who awakens as a blank slate character typically found in traditional-style RPGs. „In effect, the game plays as a turn-based dialogue-driven story, where players are not only in control of the character but also the story that changes based on their choices.”³

Each skill has its own voice and its unique perspective upon any problem that Harry and his partner, Lt. Kim Kitsuragi, come across during their investigation into the murder of a foreign mercenary. The unique position of the skills and their voices may contribute to solving an in-game problem or situation: such as when the skill „Visual Calculus” reveals the number of footprints at the very first crime scene examination by Harry and Kim⁴, or may even hinder their investigation by being unable to reveal the correct details at the scene. Later on, the same skill may assist or mislead in discovering the trajectory of the bullet that fatally wounded the victim.

The voices of skills push the conventional narrative boundary through the game's literary ambition, innovation and philosophical depth bringing „a modern nuance to traditional gameplay is the contextual

¹ The Game Awards, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://thegameawards.com/rewind/year-2019>

² Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Skills>

³ Dey, Srinjoy. *Rolling the Dice: Disco Elysium, Postmodernism and Literary Possibilities*. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33779.50723>.

⁴ Youtube, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://youtu.be/T3NTLoDfM9M?si=W-l78EavzrvBemxS&t=98>

skill development where, rather than upgrading “classic” traits such as Strength or Dexterity, our protagonist unlocks various aspects of his psyche that act as a twisted Greek chorus: each with its own personality and voice, offering (unwanted) advice in dealing with various situations.”¹ Other parts of the protagonist’s psyche, such as logic, empathy, authority, and inner empire, will more often intervene than others. The study will further analyze the ideas of archetypes, the architecture of Harry’s mind in recreating his identity, and a brief analysis of the skills.

The Architecture of the Broken Mind

Disco Elysium offers an unprecedented approach to character development through the initial array of archetypes offered even before the story begins during character creation. „The player is given the choice of archetypes, which significantly changes the dialogue options, actions the player-character can perform, and how the other characters interact with the protagonist. These archetypes are built on combinations of four basic abilities: Intellect, Psyche, Physique, and Motorics.”²

The archetypes can be viewed in illustration 1 and reveal the initial facets of Harry that will develop throughout the story. It should be noted that, despite the existence of the archetypes, the player may choose to recreate the initial starting stats for Harry as they wish. Each archetype paves the way for the skill found in illustration 2 to take command of the dialogue/monologue during the course of the story. It should also be noted that the skills become personified voices of the character’s fragmented mind and serve as a bridge in reconnecting and rebuilding the broken Harry as the main plot unfolds.

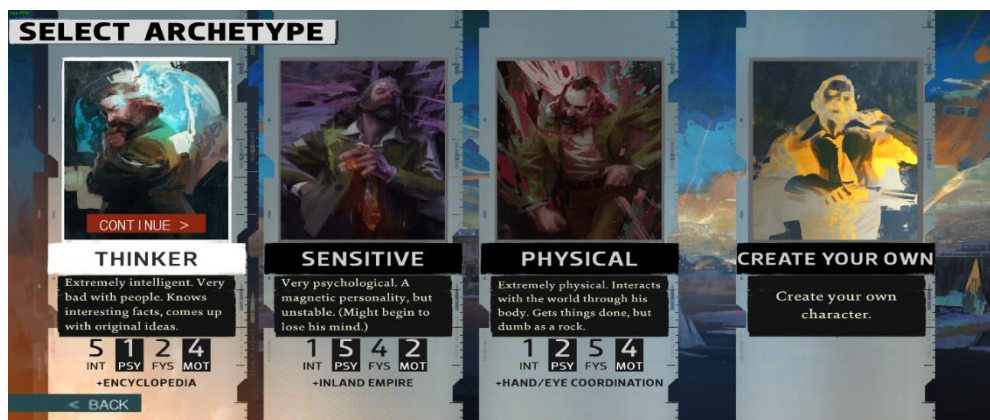


Illustration 1: Archetype Selection ³

¹ Gekker, Alex & Joseph, Daniel. (2021). *Selling Elysium: the political economy of radical game distribution*. Baltic Screen Media Review. 9. 20-31. 10.2478/bsmr-2021-0003.

² Dey, Srinjoy. *Rolling the Dice: Disco Elysium, Postmodernism and Literary Possibilities*. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33779.50723>.

³ Disco Elysium ZA/UM <https://discoelysium.com>, date of access: 25.04.2025

Illustration 2: Skills ¹

The heart of the game revolves around the division, intervention, and eventual dissent caused by Harry's internal voices, unfolding new facts, twisting the experience as the main plot and subplots come together. "The internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology."² Therefore, a brief overview of each skill is required to understand their role in the story further.

Intellect: the focus of this branch lies in logic and aids in the character and player's experience in processing external information and complex problem solving. Notably, each branch features six skills as follows:

- **Logic:** defined by the game as „Wield raw intellectual power. Dedicate the world. Cool for: Analysts, Pure Rationalists, Obviously Logicians.“³
- **Encyclopedia:** „Call upon all your knowledge. Produce fascinating trivia. Cool for: Thinkers, Historians, Trivia Freaks“⁴
- **Rhetoric:** „Practice the art of persuasion. Enjoy rigorous intellectual discourse. Cool for: Ideologues, Conversationalists, Would-Be-Politicians.“⁵
- **Drama:** „Play the actor. Lie and detect lies. Cool for: Undercover Cops, Thespians of the Stage, Psychopaths.“⁶
- **Conceptualization:** „Understand creativity. See Art in the world. Cool for: Creatives, Psychedelic Fanciers, Critics.“⁷
- **Visual Calculus:** „Reconstruct crime scenes. Make laws of physics work for the Law. Cool for: Forensics Scientists, Tactical Fighters, Math-Minded People.“⁸

¹ Erich Delang, "Disco Elysium as Modern Literature", <https://erich-delang.medium.com/disco-elysium-as-modern-literature-9d71c1c28d45>, date of access: 25.04.2025

² Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Logic>

⁴ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Encyclopedia>

⁵ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Rhetoric>

⁶ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Drama>

⁷ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Conceptualization>

⁸ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Visual_Calculus

Each skill in the Intellect branch serves in bringing the most rational conclusions, while *Encyclopedia* will often guide the player in understanding the world around them, its histories, cultures and general worldbuilding. The path of the Intellect represents the organized, the critical thinking parts of Harry's broken mind, however twisted by the presence of *Drama* and *Conceptualization* which bring a subjective and emotional flair in the ways of playing the actor, the artist, the undercover cop but also seeing and interacting with art and its aesthetic in the external world.

The blend between raw logic and emotion creates an internal struggle where Harry's ration and irrational thoughts meet and will find themselves at odds adding to the overarching thematic of cognitive dissonance and internal conflict; These skills, embodying the physical and mental traits of the protagonist, also display individual characteristics. They have motives (display of their 'usefulness' to the character), interact with each other, grow more influential (level up), and possess the ability to shape the narrative according to their points (the higher the points in certain skills, the more dominant they are).¹ By giving the skills a 'voice' it enables them to become more closer to a fully-fledged character rather than a passing thought, posing Harry's person as a carrier for the skills and creating the idea that he's merely the shell in which all these other characters reside.

Psyche: is the branch governing the emotional and social aspects of the protagonist. The skills found within the path encompass Harry's willpower, empathy, authority and his ability to read and understand the other characters he encounters throughout the story. The branch features the following:

- **Volition:** "Hold yourself together. Keep your Morale up. Cool for: Sane People, Well-Adjusted Cops, The Non-Suicidal."²
- **Inland Empire:** "Hunches and gut feelings. Dreams in waking life. Cool for: Dreamers, Para-Natural Investigators, Mental Creators."³
- **Empathy:** "Understand others. Work your mirror neurons. Cool for: Judges of Character, Interviewers, Interrogators."⁴
- **Authority:** "Intimidate the public. Assert yourself. Cool for: Leaders, Experts of Psychological Warfare, Respect-Junkies."⁵
- **Esprit de Corps:** "Connect to Station 41. Understand cop culture. Cool for: Cops, Cop-Aficionados, Pretend-Cops."⁶
- **Suggestion:** "Charm men and women. Play the puppet-master. Cool for: Diplomats, Charmers, Sociopaths."⁷

All the skills in the psyche branch allow Harry to tap into his imagination and intuition, providing glimpses into his subconscious where irrationality often overrides rationality. Where *Volition* represents the inner strength of the character and aids him in resisting the pressures of the external world, *Empathy* allows him to connect to the characters he interacts with, for instance in his phone call with Sylvie where *Empathy* continuously pushes him to discover and understand her reasons for being upset and allowing him to apologize for his past misdemeanors. However, there are skills featuring a more niche style of engagement from the protagonist and, by extension, the player. For instance, the *Esprit de Corps* skill only ever allows Harry to better understand the culture he comes from and enables different interactions with his colleagues from Station 41, notably in dialogue and initial interaction with Jean Vicquemare, Harry's former partner: "ESPRIT DE CORPS – Not far from here a 34-year-old man called Jean Vicquemare reluctantly picks his facial hair while a dark-haired woman in an officer's suit waits for an

¹ Dey, Srinjoy. *Rolling the Dice: Disco Elysium, Postmodernism and Literary Possibilities*. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33779.50723>.

² Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Volition>

³ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Inland_Empire

⁴ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Empathy>

⁵ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Authority>

⁶ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Esprit_de_Corps

⁷ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Suggestion>

answer. A typical police station morning hums in the background: telephones ringing, the whirr of a roll'o'dex..."¹

In *Disco Elysium* an emphasis is placed on both computation and randomness in action. In the first instance, this is visible in the 'cellular automata' of Harry's skills not just existing but also having numerical values that are compared to environmental values in the game's dialogue and skill check systems. It's not enough that Harry has perception –rather, his perception is computed against the difficulty factor of the environment he finds himself in. Not only this, but within the skill check system, the player must roll the dice when doing skill checks regardless of the construction of Harry. Not only is Harry produced then as the computed emergence of automata, and the interaction with his environment; a universal randomness further complicates this emergence.²

It is worth noting that more than once throughout the game, Harry experiences a lack of control over his corporeal self, in the sense that even in the game's beginning, he is met by unseen characters which are parts of his body, namely: *Ancient Reptilian Brain* and *Limbic System*. These parts of Harry's fractured self meet him during the morning he wakes up for the first time, during the second night and when he discovers his journal and manages to pull himself to read through it in detail and finding the letter from his former love interest Dora Ingerlund.

Physique: Features the named characteristics of the corporeal part of Harry, but not entirely:

- **Endurance:** „Take the blows. Don't let the world kill you. Cool for: Fighters who can take a hit, Lookouts who don't sleep, Human Batteries.”³
- **Pain Threshold:** „Shrug off the pain. They'll have to hurt you more. Cool for: Unstoppable Fighters, Guys who don't die, Masochists.”⁴
- **Physical Instrument:** „Flex powerful muscles. Enjoy healthy organs. Cool for: Muscle Men, Bare Knuckle Brawlers, Gym Teachers”⁵
- **Electrochemistry:** Go to party planet. Love and be loved by drugs. Cool for: High-Fliers, Party Enthusiasts, Cops who need Lightning.”⁶
- **Shivers:** „Raise the hair on your neck. Tune in to the city. Cool for: City Lovers, The Wisest of the Street Wise, The Genuinely Supra-Natural.”⁷
- **Half Light:** Let the body take control. Threaten people. Cool for: High-Strung Investigators, Shoot-Now-Ask-Questions-Later Cops, Surprise Haters.”⁸

While the branch focuses mostly on Harry's body and bodily strength through *Endurance*, *Pain Threshold* and *Physical Instrument*, which play a vital role in the more physical interactions and eventual confrontations Harry will be faced with, the true depth of the physical paths lies in the more abstract skills of *Electrochemistry*, *Half Light* and *Shivers*.

Notably, *Electrochemistry*, reveals the susceptibility of Harry to alcohol and other vices which are the true progenitors of his problematic existence, the skill actively pushes Harry away from his potential recovery and more often than not serves to hinder his progression rather than assist which can be seen in the following lines:

¹ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Jean_Vicquemare

² Conor McKeown, 'What Kind of Cop Are You?': *Disco Elysium's Technologies of the Self within the Posthuman Multiverse*, *Baltic Screen Media Review* 9 (2021): 68–79, <https://doi.org/10.2478/bsmr-2021-0007>.

³ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Endurance>

⁴ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Pain_Threshold

⁵ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Physical_Instrument

⁶ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Electrochemistry>

⁷ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Shivers>

⁸ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Half_Light

PAIN THRESHOLD [Medium: Success] - Yeah, a painkiller would be good about now. This thing is "pulsating" with discomfort.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY [Medium: Success] The best cure for a headache is, of course morphine. They won't have that, so cigarettes will have to do.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY - Repercussions? There's a high risk of GLORY? With a mild chance COOL GENIUS. Smoking makes you into an INTELLECTUAL, everybody knows that.

VOLITION [Medium: Success] - It only lets you concentrate because you're in nicotine withdrawal. It only mitigates it's own...

ELECTROCHEMISTRY - ...bla bla bla. Boring. Light it up!¹

It can easily be noted that while the other skills attempt to pose resistance, *Electrochemistry* does its utmost to ignore the others and push Harry right back to the path that set him on his most troublesome period. While the other skills in the physique tree ground Harry's character, they also stand to reveal his physical decline and corporeal limitations after years of vices and personal abuse.

Before the beginning of the story, Harry was a man who had succumbed to his past and the tragic abandonment by his partner Dora Ingerlund which caused the protagonist to fall into the trap of vices, most notably alcoholism. He is shown in his most fragile state both physically and mentally by the physique branch and these subjects of the story become a central part in understanding the game's idea of societal and personal decay.

Motorics: The last skill category rules over Harry's coordination and perception through the following skills:

- **Hand/Eye Coordination:** „Ready? Aim and fire. Cool for: Trick-Shooters, Snipers, Jugglers”²
- **Perception:** „See, hear and smell everything. Let no detail go unnoticed. Cool for: Fine Detail Detectives, Sensualists, Urban Scavengers.”³
- **Reaction Speed:** „The quickest to react. An untouchable man. Cool for: Shot-Dodgers, Thinkers on their Feet, Pinball-Heads.”⁴
- **Savoir Faire:** „Sneak under their noses. Stun with immense panache. Cool for: Acrobats, Thieves, Unbearable Show-Offs.”⁵
- **Interfacing:** „Master machines. Pick locks and pockets. Cool for: Machinists, Tinkerers, Instrument Players.”⁶
- **Composure:** „Straighten your back. Keep your poker face. Cool for: Card Players, Military Fetishists, Cool People.”⁷

In this particular branch, while not the most used throughout the story but keeping its relevance nonetheless throughout the plot, it enables Harry to notice more subtle and nuanced clues that others (including his partner Kim) might miss. While the skills seem much more superficial, they offer a grounded and immediate way for Harry to interact with his surroundings, while serving as a reminder

¹ Disco Elysium ZA/UM

² Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Hand-Eye_Coordination

³ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Perception>

⁴ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Reaction_Speed

⁵ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Savoir_Faire

⁶ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Interfacing>

⁷ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, <https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Composure>

to the character that while he struggles internally, he still has a form to navigate and manipulate the environment:

CEILING FAN - This fan has two chain pull switches - one ends in a tiny fan, the other in a light bulb. A truly horrific necktie has somehow attached itself to one of the blades.

INLAND EMPIRE [Medium: Success] - Or has it been consigned there as punishment? You feel as though this creature is your friend and wants to reattach itself to your neck. So that you may continue your adventures together in this strange world!

CEILING FAN - The blades come squeaking to a halt. It should be easier to reach the tie now.

SAVOIR FAIRE [Medium: Success] - You swoop up and catch the tie... snap! It's released from the blade. WARNING! WARNING! The necktie is no longer contained.

Item gained: Horrific Necktie

CEILING FAN - What you have in your hand is a fantastically colourful tie, with four or five different patterns. The knot reminds you of a noose.

LOGIC (Medium: Success] - If it's your friend, why was it up there? Who ties their friend to a ceiling fan? Maybe this thing is dangerous somehow...¹

The Mind as a Battlefield

The form of Harry's mind is neither static, nor unified, it is an arena where each branch and each skill vie for dominance over the others as can be noted in the way previously presented showing the various skill interacting with one another. Through the unique narration and individual voice, each vying for control over the broken mind, each pushing for a different approach to solving problems: where *Empathy* would urge a kinder response, *Physical Instrument* would suggest the violent approach, all the while *Savoir Faire* would question how good a certain move might look during which *Electrochemistry* would be distracted by the potential of smoking a cigarette and having a drink instead of solving the crime.

The results of the interface between each skill are a multifaceted and complex portrayal of the amnesiac detective's mind. Therefore all the inner traits, these inner demons of Harry's mind, are more than simple passengers along for the story, but are active participants in steering and guiding the experienter in unfolding the central mystery. They nuance Harry's outlook on the people, the problems, the objects and the socio-politics of the world he inhabits. Skills represent alternatives, at the same time as they reconstruct Harry's identity, they have almost complete control over his emotional responses, his perception and understanding of the world that surrounds him, and lastly his fractured sense of self. Also represented by the skills are different strategies, alternatives to finding the solution, to understand the potential suspects and the leads to the path forward.

With each playthrough, Harry will be a different character based simply on the chosen archetype as the game invites and encourages experimenting with the different skills and customizable archetype for Harry's persona. Therefore this changes the 'arena' in which the skills battle constantly for dominance creating a vastly different result for each individual experience and resulting in a different reconstruction of Harry's personality for each individual experienter.

Harry's internal voices act as both his companions throughout the investigation, but also act as autonomous agents transforming and twisting the detective's mind into a theatre of ideology, politics, art, emotion, but also violence, wrath and debauchery. They blur the lines between thought and dialogue through the mechanics of the Thought Cabinet „comprising fifty-three thoughts, which, when 'internalised,' can boost skills, change the protagonist's reputation, and reveal new story arcs and character interactions. It is also connected to the player's choice to roleplay the protagonist along any

¹ Youtube, accessed 25.04.2025, https://youtu.be/2T5Y_mTsGz0?si=TnM5Q9_khmtLCouc&t=1242

of the four ideologies—socialism, moralism, fascism, and ultraliberalism—and seven ‘copotypes’—Superstar Cop, Apocalypse Cop, Sorry Cop, Boring Cop, Honour Cop, Art Cop and Hobo Cop. These alignments also significantly impact character interactions and how the story plays out without affecting the ending.”¹

Skills challenge the ideas of internal and external manifestation, but also traditional models of agency and authorship, inviting the experienter to explore not just the external world of Revachol, but the turbulent world of a broken mind awaiting reconstruction.

The Thought Cabinet

The mechanics of the Thought Cabinet are what link the ideas and ideologies of skills together in „Thoughts are a game mechanic in Disco Elysium, offering insight into your life prior to the case, as well as stat bonuses and other minor gameplay differences.”² Comprising several *Thoughts* that relate to both the skills and Harry’s past, which is largely unknown to him, except for glimpses offered by observing characters.

Postmodernist writing is designed to raise such questions as: What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation or when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured? and so on.³

The idea behind the world of Elysium challenges the traditional notions of fictional worlds it „questions the singularity of fictional worlds as it exists in three forms—a TTRPG, a novel and a CRPG. Since the tabletop game is not made public, its adaptation to the video game and novel leaves many questions unanswered.”⁴ The Thought Cabinet becomes a mirror, an intimate interface into Harry’s psyche, in the sense that it serves to externalize his conflict, ideology, and philosophy. When the protagonist hallucinates himself the following line states: „No, Harry. You were just talking to yourself. That’s all you ever do. Even in your dreams. And the act is wearing thin, the spots of the disco ball fade around you...”⁵ signifying the troubled psyche of the detective and how the skills and thought cabinet keep him sewn together.

„Without understanding the self, the protagonist struggles to detect factual information from the lies characters tell him. In this way, the game serves as a metaphor for figuring out reality — one that managers often go through when faced with complex problems. After all, every story the others tell him seems to “make sense” without an appropriate paradigm applied to scrutinize it and assess its validity.”⁶ Considering the idea that without understanding himself, Harry is incapable of reaching valid conclusions in his investigation, the thoughts that can be internalized into the Thought Cabinet and later externalized by Harry offer valuable insight into the detective’s procedural inner workings. For example, Harry, upon meeting the Smoker on the Balcony, early in the investigation and later on leads

¹ Dey, Srinjoy. *Rolling the Dice: Disco Elysium, Postmodernism and Literary Possibilities*. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33779.50723>.

² Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Thought_Cabinet

³ Nicol, Bran. *Postmodernism and the contemporary novel: A reader*. Edinburgh University Press, 2002.

⁴ Dey, Srinjoy. "Rolling the Dice: Disco Elysium, Postmodernism and Literary Possibilities." 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33779.50723>.

⁵ Knoop, Carin Isabel. *Of Sensemaking, Mind-Mapping, and Thought Cabinets: Managerial Lessons from the Video Game Disco Elysium.*, accessed: 25.04.2025, <https://carinisabelknoop.medium.com/of-sensemaking-mind-mapping-and-thought-cabinets-managerial-lessons-from-the-video-game-disco-cc603abcaf2f>

⁶ Knoop, Carin Isabel. *Of Sensemaking, Mind-Mapping, and Thought Cabinets: Managerial Lessons from the Video Game Disco Elysium.*, accessed: 25.04.2025, <https://carinisabelknoop.medium.com/of-sensemaking-mind-mapping-and-thought-cabinets-managerial-lessons-from-the-video-game-disco-cc603abcaf2f> date of access: 25.04.2025

him to question his own sexuality leading to the Thought Cabinet presenting the following problem and solution:

Homosexual underground

Problem:

*You see mysterious strangers in the night. Leaning against unlit doorways, engaged in hushed conversation. A shadowy cabal exchanging looks, whispering in dark alleys and unmarked locales. A radical cell conspiring against the state -- and perhaps even against man and woman. Was that a secret handshake? What's going on? Who are these secretive people? How will they accomplish their sinister and world-altering goals? And most importantly -- are you **one** of them? You could be. Maybe you forgot...*

Solution:

*Maybe you should **stop** obsessing about your own - and other people's - sexuality? Feels like it's about time to do that. You've thought about this for **eight hours*?! Not only should you stop, you should tell Kim you've stopped obsessing about other people's sexuality too. I'm sure he'd appreciate it. Unless you already got him killed because you were obsessing about your sexuality. (There's no way of telling from within your brain, but for your own sake: please say you didn't.)*¹*

Which is but a single example of how the skills and thoughts linked together in the Thought Cabinet aid in the character's reconstruction. Another thought triggered by a conversation with Lena and later Joyce Messier leads to the following:

Jamais Vu (Derealization)

Problem:

*Revachol Special Administrative Region, Le Caillou, the Insulindian Ocean, Coalition Government, Insulindian Mission Command... Name after name and none of them is familiar. They seem real, but something is wrong. You feel like a kid looking at stickers on the fridge: Truvant, The Apricot Company, World Games '34. You can almost see your hand reaching out for them. Scratch at the corners, see if they peel loose... This feels like the **most** important of all the thoughts; the one you truly must complete.*

Solution:

*Jamais vu. The opposite of déjà vu. Not **already** seen, but **never** seen. Everything that should be familiar appears strange and new. Like some half-forgotten day in your childhood, only **now**. That's the feeling you've been having. And for who knows how long? You should go and ask Joyce Messier about this -- what world are we in? This is the fundamental question.*²

Conclusively, the Thought Cabinet and adjacent thoughts construct identity alongside the skills in a non-linear fashion through the intricate webbing of the internal voices and externalized thoughts. The skills creating voices to articulate Harry's fragmented dialogical self, while the thoughts in the cabinet simulate a development arc for the character by internalizing political, social and ideological ideas.

¹ Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Homo-Sexual_Underground date of access: 25.04.2025

² Disco Elysium Wiki, accessed 25.04.2025, [https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Jamais_Vu_\(Derealization\)](https://discoelysium.fandom.com/wiki/Jamais_Vu_(Derealization)) date of access: 25.04.2025

Conclusions

Disco Elysium presents a challenging and non-traditional style of storytelling and character building through intense monological and dialogical relations that create the deep psychological basis in which the skill and thought systems link together to form the character reconstruction mechanism. By giving voice to each individual skill, and even parts of the body, the game externalizes the conflicting and fractured mind of the protagonist, morphing internal cognition into the narrative. It is shown that these 'voices' are not merely present for flavouring the text, rather they are fully realized agents within the story, stitching together alongside the Thought Cabinet to represent different motivations and modes of perception. In parallel, the Thought Cabinet provides the experienter a constantly evolving internal monologue in order to externalize the individual's internalized ideas closely aligning itself to Vygotsky's idea of internalization. The thoughts are also, therefore, a record of Harry's history and background before the beginning of the story but also his means of remembering who he once was and that motivations that drove him into his current decaying self.

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BIONOTE:

Tudor-Alexandru Rusu is a graduate student currently researching topics in the areas of Ludology and Linguistics and the cross between the two disciplines. Currently researching a multimodal analysis on the intersection of language and perception on the video game "Disco Elysium".