



Master's Thesis Evaluation Form

Student's name: Tereza Picková

Thesis title: Where Games and Stories Meet:

Name of the supervisor: Barbora Spalová

Name of the opponent: Alessandro Testa

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis? Please give your reasons for the suggested grade in detail below.

1. *Does the author show understanding of one or more theories, and use theory to generate a hypothesis or to make the problem area more understandable.*

Yes, the author does.

2. *Is the research question articulated clearly and properly? Is the research question sufficiently answered in the conclusion?*

Yes, it is, although I think that, given the quality of the work and of the thinking of the author, she could have been bolder with her research questions, and dig even deeper in the problem of the interactions between gaming, storytelling, and real-life experience.

3. *Is the thesis based on relevant research and literature and does it accurately summarize and integrate the information?*

The critical theoretical apparatus, though not rich, is more than sufficiently developed. The author discusses part of the pertinent literature, and especially the classics, in an intelligent way.

The comments and integrations to Huizinga's theory of game as well as Georges' theory of storytelling based on her own material are valuable additions to the scholarship, and so is her reading and rethinking of Gary Alan Fine's paradigm (Fine, for instance, is the most important reference, and the author's arguments and analytical framework are largely based on that).

4. *What is the quality of the data or the other sources? Are the sample method, data collection and data analysis appropriate?*

Yes, data gathering and analysis are appropriate, although limited. The author could have been easily expanded her fieldwork: only one game sessions was recorded and used for the analysis proper (although her entire, long-time experience in gaming is clearly in the background), and she also did, as much as I could gather from the text,



only one round of interviews. As said, this could have been expanded, although given the small number of participants and the familiarity of the author with them, the paucity of fieldwork is theoretically compensated by the quality of the data gathered – all the researcher participants that appear in the work can be considered key-informants.

5. *Are the findings relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions of the thesis based on strong arguments?*

Yes, they are – although see point n. 9.

6. *Are the author's thoughts distinguished unambiguously from the borrowed ideas?*

Yes, they are.

7. *Is the thesis containing original/innovative research (in terms of topic, approach, and/or findings)?*

The work is rather original, although, as the author herself openly writes, “the aim of this thesis is not to create a new theory; this work rather explores possibilities of a traditional theoretical framework and its flexibility when facing new terrain, focusing on new perspective.” (p. 44). All things considered, the main theoretical contribution of the work is her recalibration and rethinking of Fine’s three-framework paradigm by integrating a fourth framework, that she theorises and uses for her own heuristic purposes throughout the text. In the last pages of the work, in the Chapter about the “Frame of the Storytellers”, the author’s interesting take is presented about the agency of the different actors within the game framework (people, players, characters, and storytellers precisely) and the “nestedness” (and sharedness and “collaborativeness”), of the relative layers on the one hand, and the possible discrepancies and inconsistencies on the other. This is a valuable contribution to the field.

8. *What is the quality of style and other formal requirements?*

The text is well-written, the overall work well-structured, and the argument are clearly developed.

9. *Are there any other strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, which are not included in the previous questions? Please list them if any.*

The thesis is well structured, and the author starts off by framing the history and main theories of gaming and roleplaying gaming more in particular, which is appropriate considering that not everybody might be familiar with this rather specific type of social activity.

The bulk of the work is aptly structured into four “frames” reflecting her take on Fine’s paradigm.

Some weaknesses can also be found:

- The author could have problematised her fieldwork a little further. At one point she writes: “Unlike in Fine’s research (see Fine 2002: 248), there was no problem with an



entrance to the terrain, as the terrain consisted of researcher's friends." (p. 40) In fact, no fieldwork is utterly unproblematic, and in fact, she herself writes, a few pages later, "Especially the position of the researcher is rather complicated" (p. 47). Nevertheless, the methodology is soundly discussed, as the author otherwise details and describes sufficiently her *modus interpretandi*.

- The work suffers from a lack of discussion of a few but very relevant and pertinent concepts, such as "fantasy (fiction)", "imagination" and "suspension of disbelief", all of which are otherwise rather present in the anthropological and sociological literature about this or similar topic. Perhaps even more sorely is the lack of a discussion on "escapism", which is one of the most discussed ideas in the field. A discussion on the ritual aspects of gaming would have also been interesting and pertinent.

The lack of a discussion on the aforementioned aspects is no minor or trivial flaw: time and again in her text the author states that the common goal of all players is just "to have fun". This is somewhat simplistic. No doubt entertainment is an important aspect and plays a crucial role, but others, too, and perhaps even more important are certainly at stake, if we look closer: the creation, manipulation, and circulation of tropes, symbols, and representations based on a variety of cultural sources; the socialising aspect and the 'ritualesque' structuring of the time for the people involved; the establishing of hierarchies, strengthening bonds (the 'prosocial function'), or on the contrary the negotiation of competitiveness and resolution of tensions within a group of friends; but also the need to "escape" from daily life and its ordinariness (the "escapist" dimension, precisely): some of these aspects are hinted upon in the very final lines of the work, in the conclusions, but are left as just hints, precisely. I think the work would have greatly benefited from a systematic, even if only brief, presentation and problematisation – or at least mention! – of these somewhat neglected aspects.

Notwithstanding these limitations and lacunae, the work remains solid – for a Master's Thesis.

10. *What topic do you suggest for the discussion in the thesis defence?*

Comments: I would recommend a discussion on the most original theoretical contribution of the work, the "Frame of the Storytellers", but also a discussion about the above-mentioned conceptual lacunae – in particular concerning the notions of "fantasy", "imagination", and "escapism".

11. *Declaration that the supervisor has read the result of the originality check in the system:* [] *Theses* [] *Turnitin* [] *Original (Urkund)*

Supervisor's comment on the originality check result:

Overall assessment of the thesis:

The thesis is a very good work and is recommended for defence, based on the above-stated reasons. It is well-written and well-structured, and presents an interesting cases study about an interesting topic that probably deserves more attention in the scholarship. As such, it is a valuable contribution to the social analysis of gaming and



role-playing games more specifically, through the methodological angles of sociology, social anthropology, game theory, and partly even social psychology.

Proposed grade:

B

Date: 24.01.2022

Signature: