

Atmospheric Punctuation and Ludic Presence in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*

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Abstract : Drawing from key concepts in ludology, the essay examines the chess game as a literal and metaphorical element that bridges the narrative's existential weight with the ludic dynamics of gameplay. Unlike traditional readings that interpret the game as a symbolic duel between humanity and mortality, this essay highlights its structural role as a rhythmic motif punctuating the film. The recurring presence of the chessboard provides a temporal and spatial framework that organizes the narrative's episodic structure, setting the stage for dialogues, drama, and action. The key hypothesis advanced here is that the chess game functions as an atmospheric punctuation rather than a mere representation of existential struggle. It operates as the underlying fabric of the narrative, structuring the characters' interactions, decisions, and reflections. The essay argues that the game's ludic nature destabilizes the narrative hierarchy, with gameplay acting as a central mediating force that organizes and reframes the film's philosophical themes. Through close analysis of key scenes, the essay explores how the chess game aligns with Bergman's cinematic language to foreground a 'ludified' narrative. In particular, the essay identifies moments where gameplay drives the plot forward, such as the Knight's strategic use of the game to delay Death and save the lives of Jof and Mia. These scenes illustrate how gameplay becomes a generative force, not only enabling narrative progression but also embedding ludic logic into the film's structure. The essay also situates *The Seventh Seal* within a broader theoretical discourse, drawing on classics like Caillois and Huizinga to contextualize the game of chess as a ritualistic and agonistic act. It incorporates Derrida's concept of *différance* to explore how the game defers resolution and creates a space of interpretive ambiguity, aligning with the film's existential themes, and it engages with Deleuze's notion of the "time-image," arguing that the chess game operates as a temporal motif that disrupts linearity and invites reflection on the passage of time. This novel interpretation positions *The Seventh Seal* as a work that transcends its existential narrative to become a cinematic "gameboard," where the act of play mediates meaning and structure. In conclusion, by foregrounding the ludic dimensions of the chess game, the essay opens up new avenues for understanding Bergman's masterpiece as a film that is not only about playing but is, in itself, a 'play'.

Keywords : Ludic Narrative, narratology, time-image, rhythm, atmospheric punctuation

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