The Emancipated Player

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UNA
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- Latin for:

- to free oneself from paternal authority

- to declare freedom

- to become independent

Emancipare

5 Hypotheses

1) The emancipated player <u>refrains from accepting a languid attitude towards representational art</u> and participates to her fullest potential in the video game (narrative).

2) The category of the emancipated player is closely tied to an <u>aesthetic complexity of video games</u>.

3) The intellectual richness of playthroughs, imaginings, and interpretations benefits from the <u>emancipated player's state of knowledge</u>.

4) The emancipated player expresses herself through play (on both an ergodic and imaginative level) as s/he engages in a <u>creative dialectic with the implied player</u>.

5) The emancipated player <u>frees herself from a confining and linear perception of video games</u> and acknowledges their multifaceted nature.

1) On the concept of emancipation in representational art (Rancière, Iser, Walton)

- Rancière: "Emancipation begins when we <u>challenge the opposition between viewing and acting</u>". "It begins when we understand <u>that viewing is also an action</u> …" (2009, p.13).

- <u>Iser:</u> closure on <u>"the level of the plot"</u> and <u>"the level of significance"</u> [the level of concept] (1978, 123).

- <u>Walton</u>: "Work worlds" and "game worlds" (1990, p.215).

- <u>Dual perspective</u>: "He observes fictional worlds as well as living in them" (273). We (simultaneously) play two sorts of games: 1) participatory games that involve us on <u>a basic level of entertainment and affective emotions</u> and 2) <u>emancipatory games</u> that allow for the close examination and reflection of props (cf. 285).

The emancipated player: hypothesis I

- *The emancipated player enjoys and understands.*

- *S/he refrains from accepting a languid attitude towards representational art and participates to her fullest potential in the video game (narrative).*

- *This means it will not satisfy her to be exclusively involved on a basic level of entertainment and affective emotions (that is, on a purely ludic or plot level), but only the thrills of significance will suffice.*

- *Emancipated play may thus only occur through the player's combined efforts of inhabiting and critically reflecting on the gameworld.*

The multifacetedness of the implied player

- "a theory of why some games are art is an important step" (Tavinor, 2014, p.61).

➤ Close analysis of the implied player and its aesthetic complexity!

- "can be seen as a role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfil for the game to 'exercise its effect'" (Aarseth 2007, p.132).

- Begs the questions: what effect?   Because there are many!

On the multi-layered qualities of the implied player

Postscript to the Name of the Rose (1986)

- Postmodern texts, so Eco, are <u>multi-layered works of fiction</u> that <u>allow for a variety of different readings</u>.

- In this sense, an adventure story can either be read for entertainment purposes only (reader involvement is limited to the *<u>level of the plot</u> and <u>affective emotions</u>*) …

- or, and on an additional plane, can be understood <u>on a higher level of significance</u> (reader involvement extends to the *<u>level of concept</u>*).

Umberto Eco
Born: 1932
Italian philosopher, literary theorist, novelist

The implied player

- Potentially <u>multi-layered</u>.

- the <u>*affordance and appeal structure of the game*</u> which holds all the preconditions necessary for the game to exercise its *aesthetic effect*.

- <u>Intersubjective and dynamic framework</u> (work world).

- that <u>outlines</u> the empirical players interaction with the game- and storyworld on all levels of involvement (game world).

The emancipated player: hypothesis II

The category of the emancipated player is closely tied to __an aesthetic complexity of video games__, and it is only when this quality is given (that is, inscribed into the implied player) that the __preconditions for experiencing play's aesthetic effect__ are given.

The emancipated player: hypothesis III

- *<u>The emancipated player slumbers in all of us</u>.*

- *However, the more knowledgeable s/he is, the better the affordance and appeal structure of the implied player can be read (or can be read in the first place) and an <u>**intellectual richness of playthroughs, imaginings, and interpretations**</u> becomes possible.*

- *This sort of emancipated involvement necessarily demarcates the emancipated player from popular culture player types.*

Gameworlds as systems of signs and perspectives

<u>Participating on the level of the level of the plot</u> (playing for entertainment and affective pleasures).

- Player <u>tries to make sense of the diegesis</u>: what happened here? What is going on? Where am I? Why am I here? What am I about to do?

<u>Participating on the level of significance</u> (emancipated play):

- Linear structure with larger multicursal areas for exploration.

- Constantly alternating ups and downs.

- The foregrounded goal in the distance (the mountain).

- A (potential) second player to share the experience with.

➢ <u>Perspective segments</u>.

The player's process of ideation
influenced by Iser (1978), Calleja (2011), Nitsche (2008), Domsch (2013)

- The virtual desert of *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) represents *a blank space* for imaginative expression and interpretation.

- The player's wandering viewpoint travels between the perspectives segments and tries to arrange them into a coherent whole:

Mountain as foregrounded goal, the segments of the world, the torturous ascends and pleasurable descends, the potential companion(s), the steps of the Hero's Journey, rules and resultant processes and play styles.

- Between the several perspective segments, blanks invariably arise. These can only be closed through the player's imaginative and physical interaction with the virtual world.

The emancipated player: hypothesis IV

- *The emancipated player expresses herself through play as s/he engages in a creative dialectic with the implied player.*

- *While doing so, s/he resembles **a scientific investigator** who employs her world knowledge to establish links and association.*

- *The emancipated player participates, observes, selects, interprets and acts upon her deliberations. S/he constantly compares and relates the diegetic events to facts about her empirical present or other works of art s/he has previously encountered.*

Journey and the search for happiness

The Potential Philoi

- "Arguably, there is no greater modern assumption than that <u>it lies within our power to find happiness</u>" (Mc Mahan, 2006, p. 12)

- <u>The philoi</u> (Aristotle, 2009, pp. 142- 183): mutual friendship (love), "the luck of finding", "sharing", "mutual pleasures and advantages," "to trust one another", "kind of openness and receptivity", "changes for better and for the worse, ... divisions, quarrels and reproaches". (Nussbaum, 2001, pp. 354 – 359).

- (helping, waiting, giving life power, ecstatically flying through the gameworld …)

- <u>Potential because outlined by the implied player</u>: the player of *Journey* might find *happiness* in a couple of aspects, the most important of which probably lies in <u>her agency to find a virtual friend</u>.

Putting player types / play styles into perspective
Bateman and Boon (2006), Kim (1998), Bartle (1996)

- <u>Gamist / achiever</u>: focus on rushing towards the end or collecting scarf pieces distracts from savouring the gameworld's aesthetic beauty its particulars.

- <u>Killer</u>: works against the potential coop player or NPC companions => the lone wanderer.

- <u>Wanderer / explorer</u>: a romantic wanderer of life and its aesthetic pleasures. Stops for a moment to enjoy beauty.

- <u>Socializer</u>: in search for philoi, spends the journey with a companion.

- <u>Emancipated player</u>: puts these play styles **into perspective (reflects on play styles)** and **compares** them to other perspective segments she gathers.

The emancipated player: hypothesis V

- *The emancipated player frees herself from a confining and linear perception of and interpretation of video games.*

- *Instead of solely analyzing a particular aspect of the video game (its procedural rhetorics or semiotic layer, for example), the emancipated player tries to see the video game (narrative) in its entirety.*

- *Consequently, a variety of different perspectives on the gameworld appear, the combination of which may create the most interesting blanks to fill in.*

Thank You   Very Much!

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