

Chapter 16

Playful Experiments: Conditions of “An Experience” in Touchscreen Games by a Non- Hermeneutic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conditions to aesthetic experience in games for touchscreen devices from a non-hermeneutic perspective. For that reason, the body and the technical devices are taken as fundamental dimensions in the process of having “an experience”, in which their material aspects are not indifferent. In other words, what is of interest is to analyze game situations and the mutual influence between player and game, in the sense of identifying elements that could lead to “an experience”, taking as objects the games Mountain and Monument Valley. Moreover, concerns to understand how such titles contribute to the broadening of the technoludic experience. The article is sustained in the induction that from the moment in which characteristics of traditional games are tensioned, it seems that they assume an air of experimentation in their ways of calling to action. We argue that “an experience” can emerge from the articulation between “effects of presence” and “effects of meaning”, so that the material constitution of the medium is not indifferent.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary times present us with a very particular scenery of the human condition. Gradually the ways in which the world is felt and experimented seem to orbit in a limbo between the digital and the organic, between the mechanical and the physical. In such a context, perceiving and conjecturing about human manifestations presents itself as a demanding task for interdisciplinary efforts, given the complexity of the phenomena that arise.

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The objective of this article is grounded in the scenery of hybridization between computing devices and human faculties. Specifically, entertainment is situated as a gear of crucial importance in structuring contemporary times: in a particular way, electronic games stand out as a most salient expression of that very cultural industry¹. Games are considered as powerful media, especially in regards to its forms of reception. Simply put, the act of playing consists of an interaction between the player and the game through a physical device. This dialogical process is the subject of this article.

The conditions of aesthetic experience in games with touchscreen interfaces are hereby inquired, from a non-hermeneutic standpoint (Gumbrecht, 2004), placing material devices and its relationships with bodily functions as fundamental dimensions of this process. In other words, we intend to analyze game situations and mutual influence between players and the game, in the sense of identifying elements that could lead to “an experience” (Dewey, 1980), examining games as *Mountain* (O’Reilly, 2014) and *Monument Valley* (ustwo, 2014). We sustain that experiential aspects are involved in the performance of playing, departing from the moment when traditional characteristics of games are tensioned – largely due to the digital creative possibilities. We argue that an experience can emerge from the articulation between effects of presence and effects of meaning (Gumbrecht, 2004), in such a way that makes impossible to disregard the material constitution of the game media devices.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND PERFORMANCE

On a flat surface, the most effective way of joining two separate points is through a straight line. The connection between the poles assumes a connecting element, which, in turn, results in a new spatial configuration. This same line draw itself in a progressive and orderly manner, leaving a place and heading to another, continuously. This illustration is taken as a way to examine some delineations of the concepts of *experience* and *game* and the resulting transposition of the latter to the digital landscape, placing what is in between as a guiding thread of the argument.

Thus, pragmatism addresses the issue of experience as an active movement between the living creature and the surrounding environment (Dewey, 1980). Among past experiences - constructs of socio-historical order - and the situation at hand, the subject captures and is captured, affects and allows to be affected by what is revealed to the senses. It is an everyday game by which subjects constantly sense the surroundings while being inserted in it, in a rather conscious manner. So, to conceive experience in pragmatism one must imply a special attention to the “in-between” space of one and another instance: past and present, with respect to time; body and environment, in relation to space. It is worth noting, however, that this duality is not presented as a separation, but as a continuous sharing that ultimately characterizes the flow of life itself.

In this sense, experience arises primarily from interactive situations. That is, the planning activity aimed at a particular accomplishment is what gives the status of experience to a conscious movement. Through successive phases, the seemingly dichotomic aspect of interactions is integrated in a mutual equilibrium that results in affectations. Just as the line that connects two separate points, it is a cumulative process that aims a specific purpose, as described by John Dewey (1980):

Every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives. A man does something; he lifts, let us say, a stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers,

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