

Virtual Narrative and Computer Games¹

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Abstract

Nowadays the modern information technologies are highly developed and they are including not only the creation of new electronic devices, but also the creation of so-called virtual worlds, to which we can attribute the computer games. Different computer games reveal the variety of forms of escapism and practice of immerse in virtual world, plurality of the diverse layers of the modern culture, show the creative potential of the gamer and game creators, their communicative abilities and the power of imagination.

Keywords: *computer games, virtual reality, information technologies, sign, semiosis, semiotic, narrative.*

Nowadays the modern information technologies are gaining more and more spheres; they are extending, developing their potential. The modern man just cannot imagine his world without gadgets, which to a certain extent, make life easier, and more comfortable. At present time, the information technologies are including not only the development of new electronic devices, but also the creation of so-called virtual worlds.

Virtual worlds are some kind of projection, created and reproduced by means of modern technologies. These worlds are partly autonomous, but technologically and perceptually they are related to actual reality. The phenomenon of virtual worlds is used to create computer games – a special virtual reality, in which a person thinks and realizes his presence. In this case the virtual reality resembles the actual reality because the man can see it and think it as seen. This effect was described by F. Ponge in his book "The voice of things", he wrote: "This tendency to endow the world, the totality of things, which I see and which I think to be seen..." (Ponge, 2000). In spite the similarity between our and virtual reality, there are a certain differences between them.

The modern computer games allow to find answers to philosophical questions of freedom, good and evil, love, war and peace, as well as to realize his creative abilities. Of course the game as cultural and individual psychological phenomenon has a variety of functions, which were analyzed in the works of psychologists, educators, philosophers, cultural studies.

"The new interpretation of this difficult problems, of course, very tempting, but it seems possible, apparently, only in the course of further deeper and meaningful development and understanding of this concept of virtual worlds" (Achkurin, 2000).

The modern computers have reached a high degree of progress, so, today we can see on the screen the alternative, "living" world in all its brilliance.

Moreover, special equipment (goggles, special motion sensors) create the illusion of full immersion in virtual reality.

The main goal of our research is to analyze the different aspects of virtual world of computer games, especially the connection between virtual reality and the man, and its cognitive processes.

In this paper, we use semiological methodology, which was developed in the framework of structuralism, and semiotics pragmatist approaches, which treat as a sign a wide range of phenomena. Also we use the method iconic

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identity, consisting in attempt of researchers to immerse themselves in a virtual narrative and fell theirs alter ego in the epiphanic unity with itself. We tried to use the method of immersion in the sense, which allows immersing inside the virtual narrative as a kind of quasispaces at semantic and perceptual level.

So, the main question is: "Why millions of people playing the computer games?" To give answer to this question is not the easy deal. There are a lot of factors, which are influenced on the popularity of computer games. One of the main is disunity of the real being. In this disunity, the man loses his identity and the main goal of his life becomes to find itself, to find his own way, which often can lead to another, virtual reality. In this case we are dealing with so-called process of escapism, when one tries to escape from the reality to the image (or in our case technically created) world. Moreover the attempt to escape can be provoked by different factors which can exist not only in the reality, but also in the game.

From the point of view of clinical and psychological approach, the game can be analyzed as an indicator of mental health of the each person and as an indicator of the health of society as a whole" (Muhanova, 2002). In this psychological factor we can distinguish the factor of different fears and horrors of the man. But this medal has also two sides.

The first one is, that the person playing the computer games tries to find in it ways to overcome his fears. For example the man who are afraid of ghost and various supernatural phenomenon, could play such computer games as "Ghost hunting adventure", "F.E.A.R." etc. In this case the computer game appears as a "mirror" and the man playing the game can face his fear. Feeling himself in home, in safe place, the person overcomes the fear faster, that he would be in a real place of the accident.

Another side of the medal contains the fear of a real world. It is known that some people try to reduce contact with the real world to minimum, because of its fear of humanity or the fear of real human contact. In these case they see the only one solution – to play computer online games, such as "Linage", "World of Warcraft", "DOTA", "Perfect world" etc. The big totality of such games is fantastic, so the man can be a warrior, lancer, wizard, princess, magician etc. and have a supernatural power. Also they can choose any appearance or fantasy race. In such game the real appearance of the person is hidden by a simulacrum, which can exist only virtually. In this situation, the person turns into a sign, as a kind of mixture of semiotic correlation and cross semiotic codes. By means of information technologies is gained the effect of real communication and the contact in virtual world. The participants of cyber-discussion of online games use semiotic ways of interaction. Appears some changes in the character of "I-We" relationship described by Schutz (Schutz, 1976). It is possible that the transformation of man into a complex sign.

The psychological aspect is closely connected with cultural studies, because the computer games can be considered as a memory of generation, which saves traces of human activity, or can be connected with religious, mythological, or even a magical worldview of a people.

An example may serve a convention of the death of the character (which, after the "death" appears again or a player launches a saved game).

"Speaking about the mythological death of the hero is worth to mention the motive of reincarnation, that is to say, a hero dies several times during the game, but he can be revived thanks to its preserved stages. In addition to this, exist a great number of games, which are based on mythology, or combine elements of archaic, archetypal images and the modern reality. For example the game «Loki» tells us the story of hero's journey not only in ancient Scandinavia, but also in Egypt, ancient Greece, and Latin America. In all locations the player faces the monsters that have been taken from ancient beliefs and legends.

Moreover some computer games allow us to "touch" the ancient or on the contrary the future. In this case the gamer becomes a direct participant of the past events. Now he can be a crusader, warrior, king or a queen. Such games gives us an opportunity to see by our own eyes ancient cities, rulers etc. For example the game "Assassins Creed" shows us all the splendor of Venice of XV century. The person also can meet with famous people of that time such as: Leonardo da Vinci, the Borgia family, Catherine Sforza etc.

Often the computer game tells us a story which events take place in the future of our world. In this case, creators of the game show us a possible future of our planet. Very often this future is unhappy due to some disaster which has destroyed our civilization. The main goal of the game is survive or to destroy the enemy. Such scripts of the future give creator an opportunity to realize all their imagination and creative potential. We just enumerate some of this games and its scenarios of the future: "Lost planet" – people left the planet and now live at another planets where they fighting with the giant insects; "Dead space" – the people left the Earth and now leave in space in special stations; "Remember me" – the face of the Earth was changed due to technical revolution, etc. In such games the player shouldn't image but should see the possible future of the Earth, see the future face of the cities, countries. This image is changing from game to game, but the main task of the gamer is the same – to percept it and try to develop the story is such way, which could not lead to bigger disaster. Here (as in the main quantity of the games) a special role plays the "hero" factor. It means that computer games give one an opportunity to be a hero, and what is more important to feel himself as a hero. The great

number of the games is based on the rescuing of the girl, friends, family or even a whole country or the world. The man, immersed in such games, is feeling the "super power" even he is sitting in his own room and just clicking the mouse. This effect can be reached due to narrative story (the main goal of the game is to rescue somebody or something), special video and tactile effects (video vignette of catastrophes and disasters, the vibration of the control panel which are depending on man's actions). The game in this case becomes an interactive movie, when due to the actions of the gamer depends the end of the game (examples of such games are: "Heavy rain", "Fahrenheit: Indigo prophecy").

Also we should mark simulation games, where the player can live his "own, real" life but in the virtual space. It means that the game is a simulation of a "real human life", the technical meanings provide to create even a virtual clone of the player so he can live more than one "his one lives". This type of the game is also use as a education component, for example in the education of car driving, or creation of the cities models.

Every genre of computer games provides a person the opportunity to realize their own creative abilities.

We should note the words of N. Muhanova, who writes: "The battles of the hobbits do not end with the goblin's death or serious defeat, and the winner does not get any significant growth for its internal qualities. These skills are useless in the real world " (Muhanova, 2002).

However, we cannot ignore the fact that playing computer games, the player strives to improve, to achieve greater results, to some growth. Especially this shows in the games of the genre RPG, where the player has to create his own character, gives him a certain set of qualities and characteristics and has to develop its, performing specific tasks. Even if the mission is failed, the player can always restart it. This creates an illusion of omnipotence and safety (Muhanova, 2002).

"Drowned into the game of virtual reality the man notices that virtual reality is just a reality that made of his own depths the computer reality " (Savchuk, 1996).

Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that the virtual world, not only makes a person addicted to the illusion, but also reveals the his creative potential. The man is aware that in the real world he is the one who exist, so appear a desire to create analogs that may exist in different possible worlds. One of the authors of the concept of possible worlds, J. Lewis, though, and recognized the importance of all possible worlds, but it didn't deny the influence of the existing reality (Lotman, 1994).

As a conclusion we should note that computer games create a virtual-narrative world, which in some way, can substitute the dimensions of actual reality for the modern man. Virtual-game narrative plays an imaginative-compensatory function in the modern culture, and permits many people to fill lack of communication, action, which can't be managed in the real world.

Different types and genres of computer games revel the variety of forms of escapism and practice of immerse in virtual world, plurality of the diverse layers of the modern culture.

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