

Essay about leader

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Introduction

This literature review aims to discuss and analyse the application of the narrative, within the mechanics of video game designs. This review separates into several segments to analyse and clarify the existing theories and terms that are used commonly in the narrative design in game mechanics. It will then move on to define what is the narrative within the game mechanic as a theory and as a mechanic. Next the review will discuss the different roles the narrative serves in enhancing the gameplay experience. Throughout this review, case studies will be used to represent the physical example of how the narrative in games can elevate the gaming experience and its necessity within game mechanics.

Instinctual Desire to Immerse

Within the game design industry, the narrative is a medium that can provide an immersive experience by crafting a realistic story world and background chronicles within a video game in either PC or console-type platforms. It populates what would probably be an empty world with cultures and people that is only possible through the application of game narratives. The term intrinsic narrative will be analysed at the beginning of this review as it refers to the concept of applying narrative mediums such as text, visual elements or voice-over dialogues to weave an immersive experience. The intrinsic narrative provokes the instinctual effect, which is subconsciously programmed in humans to be drawn into stories with an intensity, discarding their actual reality. In game mechanics, this instinctual effect relates to the player participating and immersing themselves within the virtual world of the

video game. Referring to Janet Murray's 'Hamlet on the Holodeck', the term 'immersion' denotes as an 'experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content'. This innate desire to immerse oneself within a fantasy aroused by a fictional world through a participatory interactive digital medium, such as video games, is used to satisfy an individual with an overflowing plethora of sensory simulations. Micheal Nitsche breaks down how such an immersive experience is achieved from the contributing factors within the virtual game space such as the fictional space and player space. The fictional space confronts the appearance and imagination of a world through provided information. Based on the fictional world, the play space is determined by the player's actions towards the game space. With this continuous engagement, they form a designated space in the physical world that connects the player and the gaming system. It is this combination of human instincts that desire to relate to the fictional and practical space that the virtual provides which makes the intrinsic narrative a critical component. In its most rudimentary form, all games apply a fictional lore to introduce a context to its current story arc or gameplay. And in doing so it banks on the human trait to desire more substance in a story that elevates the player experience and influences the player to form a deeper connection and understanding towards this fictional game.

Importance of Narrative Design

The game industry achieves this goal by applying narrative design as a key component within the mechanics of their game designs. Within this classification of the term 'narrative design' it can be broken down into two

classifications, the visual narrative and the acoustic narrative. These two classifications are defined by their form of sensory, and when paired together they produce a compelling narrative, To produce a compelling and immersive experience, the game designer must find balance in, “ the art of using gameplay and the sum of visual and acoustic methods to create an entertaining and engaging experience for players.” A narrative design is unable to function efficiently without the visual or the acoustic narratives. It is this balance of both visual elements and speech that allows narrative design to craft dystopian worlds of fantasy and science fiction worlds. It is this key concept which clarifies, “ a narrative is a text that tells a story, but in understanding this story, it is important to consider it is not just its content, but it is also its forms, expression and meanings, and both how they were intended and received.” The role of the narrative is even prominent within the gaming world as it presents the narrative in a different way than traditional media. It applies an interactive mechanic that only video games are capable of communicating. This interactive function of, “ video games encourages rather than inhibits the evolution of narrative thus video games should be seen as a new branch of narrative storytelling that utilises and merges the familiar structures and elements of traditional narratives.” It is this mechanic that makes the narrative play a prominent and important role within the game design. The way that the narrative compliments this mechanic is in the method that it communicates its storyline through the visual design of its contents and characters.

Determining Visual Narratives

The medium used to represent the physical worlds and societies through visual elements, is the visual narrative. The label ' Visual Narrative' is applied in a generic sense to denote anything from a comic book to motion picture films. This medium is acquainted with industries that mainly seek to craft a compelling story, such as Animation, Illustrations, and Video games. Though this medium is not classified as a practice, each individual industry has departments or teams that solely work on the concept of communicating an immersive story through those of visual elements. Therefore it is clear that the application and need for visual narrative it crucial when crafting a story as this is present throughout all the industries that produce fictional content. What relates all these industries together to apply visual narrative is essentially their need to explore visuals that are capable of telling stories. The term visual narrative can be broken down further which consists of three other classifications. The first being static visual narrative, the second being motion visual narrative and lastly, interactive visual narrative which is heavily applied concept in video games. To briefly explain these classifications, the static visual narrative is the term for any form of visual illustration or sketch that is used to communicate the narrative. Within this category lie the illustrators, graffiti artists and painters, practitioners that focus on the perfecting the art of the still image. Within the term visual narrative, the static visual narrative is the oldest and most dated category as it is in essence the traditional form of visual communication. The second category, known as motion visual narrative was introduced with the advent of the television. With technologies that could produce moving images, the

term motion visual narrative categorises practitioners such as animators and film effect editors. As its name describes this category is specifically catered towards the moving image. Lastly, the latest edition to the family of visual narrative, known as interactive narrative, refers to the concept of providing the viewer the opportunity to interact and effect the narrative within the digital space. To define what interactive visual narratives are, ' it is on the basis of extensive viewer interaction with the visual narrative. The quality of a interactive visual narrative consists of both static and dynamic visual narrative elements whereby the viewer. And it is this specific mechanic that this review will analysing, to understand how it is applied within the game mechanics during the process of crafting the game, and how a well crafted interactive visual narrative has the ability to enhance the players experience with the game. The interactive visual narrative can be applied to the game mechanics to achieve or fill specific roles within the games structure. This the basic theory of the visual narrative and how it is social and practical concept that gives greater to substance to fictional material.

Visual Narratives Role in Game Mechanics

In the previous discussion the physical and tangible applications of static and dynamic narratives were clearly defined. In game mechanics, the term interactive visual narrative is present within the forms, “ of interlinked elements: a story (histoire), which is the contents, the chain of events, characters, settings, and a discourse (discours), which refers to the meaning its expression and how the content is communicated.”

Captivating Fantasy Visual Elements

The first concept that the narrative applies to elevate the experience, is by enhancing the gameplay by crafting aesthetically captivating visual elements. These elements come in the form of the character designs and the world designs that the player interacts with. Game worlds are generally classified under two main archetypes, “ the mimetic reconstruction of real life and those resigned to fantasy worlds.” In the fantasy world archetype, the contents are originally designed and crafted with rich detail and history. The game Ni no Kuni 2 developed by Level 5, and released in 2018. The game is unique in character, setting and world design style as its visual elements seamlessly appear to be almost like and animated film, rather than a video game. According to Andrew Brewster, a writer in The Verge, an American technology news and media network that reviews products , he states that “ A large part of the appeal of the Ni No Kuni series is how the games look: it’s like you’re wandering around inside a lush Studio Ghibli animated film while playing a fantastical role-playing game.” Its ability to explore the boundaries of fictional stories that the narrative can captivate the viewer by manifesting visually the concept and appearance of a completely unique and original world.

Realistic Visual Elements

The second archetype is the realistic reconstruction. In this classification, the narrative is crafted from existing elements within the real world and is reconstructed to produce a fictional story within a relatable real world setting. To replicate the aesthetics and perception of reality, the archetype applies existing associations and images that evoke real world

environments. An example of this concept is the online multiplayer first person shooter warfare simulator, Battlefield 5. Developed by EA and DICE, released in 2018, the game runs on the Frostbite game engine that is known for its ability to process detailed and clear graphics. It is the minor details in which the game shows its visual prowess, the map designs are from actual locations where actual battles had occurred during the Second World War. It captivated players with, “ a visually stunning world inspired by some of the most brutal battles in history. Each of the eight maps provided at launch excite the eye, from idyllic villages to cities reduced to rubble. Fantastic weather and lighting effects add to the experience as does the sheer scope of destruction. Whether you’re fighting in the cramped streets of Rotterdam or the snow-strewn landscape of the Arctic Fjord, you feel as though you’re reliving the pivotal conflicts of World War II.” It is by these archetypes that the visual narrative weaves a compelling tale with simply the games environment. It was previously discussed in the beginning of this review that instinctually, the human need to involve themselves and become immersed into a story is exactly what this concept bank on to enhance the gameplay experience.

World Building and Character Design

The next concept is the narratives ability to build a completely original world and characters to populate it. While the previous concept discussed the aesthetic appeal that the narrative provides, this concept delves deeper into the actual mechanics that is applied in narrative design within game mechanics. This is crucial as despite the fact that the purpose of the

narrative is to appeal to the player, this review seeks to understand the theoretical aspects that can influence or effect the narrative design.

One key aspect for a visual narrative to be established within a video game virtual space, is that it formulates the world build. This aspect of game mechanics for world-building is explained in *The Game Narrative Toolbox* by four narrative designers Tobias Heussner, Kristen Finley, Jennifer B. Hepler and Ann Lemay, whereby with the narrative detailing the setting and the world's scope, it's visual output relies on the a macro-level and micro approach. An example of a macro level are game is the aforementioned *Super Mario Bros* by Nintendo, working with broad concepts and is then applied to the whole game world in *Super Mario*. Micro level on the other hand, focuses on a small part then expands out. For instance, *Bioshock Infinite* by Irrational Games and 2K Games as an example. Its narrative is a distillation of technological magic with the world environment being late 18th-century nationalism and religious revival with a false sense of free will. Even though, the linear narrative applied is scripted and it leaves the players with no control of their character, the narrative was compelling enough to keep the player immersed.

Analysing deeper into its world build, it is constructed on a micro level using the ' Perfect World' archetype whereby it presents itself as the ideal perfect world. In *Bioshock Infinite*, the game borrows American historical monuments, highlighting the topic of American exceptionalism and racism through the highly esteemed fictional steampunk world of Columbia. It applies Eighteenth century context to provide its environment substance as

it applies the political and religious ideals and events of that time period to influence the culture and the society of the world build. One clear example is when during the gameplay the player comes across an environment that presents these ideals and their effects visually. It is featured where the, “ Columbia’s Hall of Heroes exhibit glorifies America’s involvement in the Wounded Knee Massacre, which occurred on the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in the U. S state of South Dakota, and the Boxer Rebellion, a Chinese uprising in northern China against the spread of Western and Japanese influence. Stereotypical characteristics of America’s Indian and Chinese counterparts are also heavily exaggerated throughout the tour.” A brief overview of the game is that this air city establishes as an exclusive society that seceded from the rest of the world under The Founder’s territory. The architecture adopts a predominant neoclassical aesthetic using stucco white buildings, symbolising the emerging concept of American nationalism re-accounting through the infamous World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago 1893. The archipelago of grand buildings, manicured promenades, vendors selling hot dogs and people strolling about visiting the carnival, on the surface, is the very picture of good old American past. Additionally, it addresses the concepts of Columbia’s steampunk aesthetics as in reference to the Columbian Exposition, it ‘ marked the dawn of a new technological era, introducing the alternating current lightbulb developed by Westinghouse, and showing visitors myriad other innovations and marvels.’

Character Build

The characters designs were given the same treatment in order to keep the overall theme consistent. The designs of the characters though are more fine tuned as the characters are the main interactive mechanic throughout the course of the gameplay. The character Booker Dewitt in BioShock infinite, is one example as he is classified as a ‘ Fixed Character’. A fixed character is a character type a game narrative designer has to ‘ convince players to get into specific roles and identify with these characters and their choices’. This looks at the character’s personality, behavioural development and backstories. The powers allocated to the character defines them as well. The player’s contribution is only to ‘ control their moment-to-moment actions. The narrative is used to further craft a deeper and personal background to the character to allow the player to form a emotional connection with the protagonist. The narrative portrays Booker was a former soldier and Pinkerton and throughout the game to is literally echoed that his mission was to ‘ bring the girl and wipe away the debt’. Therefore, convinces his taciturn and serious personality.

Game Story Structure

The goal for every interactive game is to make the player feel in control of their gaming experience and to be convinced that their actions benefits the plot or in-game mission. This engagement will depend on the linearity of a game’s story where the structure of the gameplay and mechanics would be catered differently. To comprehend the narrative structure better, there 3 broad categories: Linear Narratives, Branching Narratives and Open Narratives. Defining Linear, Branching and Open Narratives Firstly, linear

narratives are basically events placed in a fixed order every time, a game is played. Its main challenges are to deal with how the story and gameplay would intersect while keeping the player at the forefront of the action. This is typical in most action-adventure genres like Square Enix's Kingdom Hearts trilogy and Capcom's Devil May Cry series. Secondly, branching narratives is a non-linear experience. Basically, it operates on the illusion of choice that lets players perform selection of from a fixed route presented to them in any order of their preference. Bioware's Telltale series exemplifies the feature about giving player choices while ensuring coherent storyline across the entire game through monitoring the player's actions stays on the overall story's path. Lastly, the open narrative aims for a true non-linear experience where the player has the complete freedom to complete content without any directed sequence. This is most prominent in Sandbox and MMORPG games such as Minecraft, ROBLOX and MapleStory etc. Of 3 categories, the review will focus on non-linear narratives specifically as large proportion of current-gen games with branching narrative has the best-response within the AAA game market like Detroit Become Human by Quantic Dreams. The reason being that it is the middle ground between Open narrative and Linear narrative, that progresses heavily according to player's participation.

Player Agency and the Narrative Element

Through the course of this literature review, the importance and role of the narrative has been extensively covered. However the practice of crafting a narrative is clearly perceived as a supportive element rather than a crucial and fundamental necessity in game design today. This discussion will now compare the narrative with the player agency mechanic which is prominent

within branching narratives as another important and necessary mechanic that is involved in game design. This comparison aims to highlight firstly, that within game mechanics, the majority of aspects and mechanics rely on or work on hand with the narrative which clarifies that , secondly the narrative is a far more critical component then initially assumed by most professionals in the game design industry.

The player ‘ agency’ component refers to a player’s belief that the choice and actions are what drives the events of the story. There is a need to honour players with a sense of ‘ agency’ otherwise, the game scenes will fall flat. A good player agency is about having the player make choices both large and small so not every choice should be a matter of life and death, they should still meaningful something to the character and the plot. What the narrative does to work the sense of agency is that it interweaves with it. The application of branching narratives and player agency is can be either in a multiple ending plot line or a moral agency. An example of how a game would fall flat in term’s of player agency would be Bioware’s Telltale series who are known their episodal contents and distinct cel-shaded graphic style that follows the original medium: Bill Willingham’s multi-award-winning Fables graphic novels.

In The Wolf Among Us, the gameplay relies heavily on player agency and the narrative would play out according to the selected choices. The problem in their player agency is promising choice and not delivering on them. In an episode, it provides with a series of choice catered according to Bigby Wolf’s personality to deal with certain fable characters either favourable or

detestably. Example, when responding to Snow White, it popups that say that “ Snow White likes your answer”. However, she does not return for the remainder of the episodes until very much later. This causes a controversy amongst gamers as this is what they would label a game as ‘ a virtual sightseeing tour’. A game that succeeds in both narrative and player agency would Dishonored 2 by Arkane Studios. It has a non-linear gameplay which aims to obtain a true story impact coming from the player, not ones that came from a written moment. The player agencies exposed from the avatar selection. Either the route of the defamed Empress, Emily Kaldwin or bodyguard cum assassin & Father to the Queen, Corvo Attano. Each characters thrive with different set of skills. Example, Corvo is able to conduct stealthy missions easier while Emily’s skills enables her to subjugate enemies in groups. The second agency that is recurrent through the game’s morality system: the Lethal and Evil route or the Non-lethal and Peaceful route. Based on the agency that the player chooses the execute, it affects the ability and character development of either gory subjugations or more non-lethal options. The ending is a reflection of the overall missions out of multiple endings. Example, if Emily embarked on the high chaotic route, she would be labelled as the tyrannical Empress who rules using fear. Due to the character’s narrative is structured in a way that would be conformed accordingly to the player’s actions, it fulfils the essence of what an agency promised according to what the player wants. In this aspect, Dishonoured 2 does extremely with its many agencies to every goal portrayed by the narrative. The game works because “ it doesn’t pretend to literally grapple over realistic moral decisions. It lays out a series of storytelling options and

asks which one you find most interesting.” Additionally, the “ storytelling is as much of a system as any of your powers or weapons, and it’s expressed as much with architecture as with words.”

Conclusion

Through the course of this review, it has examined and addressed the importance of the applying narratives both in visual and content. Their workings is in concurrent to the video gameplay mechanics and enhancing the world build in both macro and micro forms. From there, it delves deeper into storytelling mechanic within the making of the games how it would influence, player experience. From those case studies, it is clear that with video games as the medium, visual storytelling has the potential to push for immersive player engagement and player experience. This is achievable if both gameplay mechanics and the narrative design were to be weighed both equally as indispensable instead of viewing narrative as a subcomponent or a core component. The lacklustre in a narrative could lead either to predictable plots or fragmented plots like Capcom’s Bayonetta, whereas an over reliant narrative structure and rejection of traditional game mechanics will lead to the derogatory name of being a virtual walking simulator.