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“GAME” IN HISTORY, HISTORICAL IN “GAME”

Abstract: This paper is considered with relation between game and the History, in three various aspects: first part is dedicated to the meaning of noun “game” from its early stages till today, the second part relates to influences of game on human development and the third part deals with objectivity of historical facts in computer games.

Key words: game, history, historical facts, education, computer games.

This paper deals with interaction between game and history. It consists of three different parts. First section examines the notion of game in history, the second deals with the importance of game in its contemporary meaning and its influence on the development of one’s artistic abilities, knowledge and intellect. The last one deals with historical elements in a game. Also, here is the table result of the questionnaire which came to life in practice on the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade’s, Department of History, section for Medieval National studies¹ and in Petnica Science Center, Valjevo². The end lists References for future reading and Additional references for educational game pages.

The game in history

There are many definitions of the term game. All of them, consist of few crucial elements, such are free time and entertainment [1]. According to some historians, such as *Johann Heuzinga*, the game represents *the quality of action, different from ordinary life*. Behind this idea, very wide spectar of human activities hides. Thus, the Latin word *ludus*, or Old Slavonic word *узрý*, have a large number of meanings – from dance to gambling. For example, the Latin verb *ludere* firstly meant *getting out on stage*. Later it gained other meanings, like joke and fun. Therefore, noun *ludius* means an actor, or a comedian. So, these words do not necessarily represent only child games, but their usage which is implied through the public character in sense of competitive games. In these games participants showed their skills, necessary for everyday life, like physical strength, endurance, their effectiveness in handling various weapons (in Anthic Olympic games or chivalry duels in feudalism), etc. No matter what kind of game it was, wheter only acting or competition, they all included one very important element- simulation of reality. Virtual reality.

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They also implied free festivity time for their performance as well as the performing place, playground or theater scene. In this way the game was closely connected with observing and watching. In the same time there was another Latin term for the game – *iocus* (gl. *iocari*), which means joke, fun, but also could mean a toy. Therefore, this term was often used for the entertainer in France (jongler) and similar in German (spiel, spielmann) [2]. Different developments of connection between terms *ludus* and *iocus*, as well as the rise of new games contributed to the creation of new categories, such as sports. The noun game has recently earned a new meaning, i.e., a computer game [3].

The influence of games on physical and intellectual development

Here it is not quite necessary to discuss in detail the significance of games for *Homo sapiens* as social beings. We can say: *homo sapiens* is *homo faber* and in the same time he is *homo ludens*. It is widely known that its influence on humans is very strong, especially in obtaining knowledge and everyday life experience. This virtual reality could be seen in some child games, while the others are dedicated to the skill development. Thus a girl, imitating her mother, makes cookies for dolls. Double Dutch, no matter how fun and reckless girls look while playing it, it actually leads them towards the better coordination. Alexander S. Neill, the author of the book, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (1984), dedicated his work to the notion of game as a learning process. In present, a computer game gives us various opportunities for learning. Computers have become the new interactive toys, while the Internet symbolizes the new playground. For example, *Counter strike* became very big action hit, not only among young ones. It represents the sort of games for which coordination of moves and speeds of reflexes are essential. The older games like *Super Mario* had these characteristics, too. Today, the application of computer games, as exercises for the military purposes, is common practice. Some simplest games, like crosswords, are essentially important, not only for enrichment of native, but also for foreign lexical fond. This concept has already contributed to the formation of numerous similar games for learning the foreign language. Here, we should mention the games whose solution also demands the comprehension of combinatory or the mathematic elements. The development in these directions brought to life a special kind of games entitled *Educational games* and *Edutainment games*. The similarity is in their educational character, but the difference is seen on the level of entertainment. The last have both: educational role and a moment of pleasure [4].

How much games could help to the educational processes? Can they take the place in class or not, are only some of questions. Many specialists from unlike sciences, as well as many parents and children, try to give us response to those questions [5].

The historical elements and facts in a computer game

During their expansion, computer games were separated by divisions, according to various criteria and depending on players' activities (by Wikipedia, three main groups are major genres, notable genres and superseded genres). We are going to emphasize only some notable subgroups, for analyses of historical elements in them. In

relation of game and history, two crucial questions are to be asked. The first one is related to the informative and educational aspects of computer games and the second one is related to the validity of the historical facts presented in the games.

From historical point of view, they could be separated on those which consist of history thematic and facts, those based on history background of some events (like the D-day) and the others. Certain types of games such as *Simulations* and *Strategies* could be instructive for understanding historical processes. Therefore, while playing the *Tycoon* games (*Railroad*, *Transport*, etc.) we could gain knowledge of transport systems (e.g. railways), which played important role in the history of communications. Famous strategic simulations like *Sid Meier's Civilization* and *Empire Earth* emphasizes inevitable correlation between politics, wars, economy, communications, science and progress in history. Negligence of the resource gathering (storage of grain, gold, stones, wood etc.) and their spending exclusively for military purposes brings the empire on the verge of decline and *vice versa*. Time line, which is important element of many games, is an historical category, and to make progress in particular game, technology and agricultural development is necessary. Also in *Civilization I*, you have few quizzes through game, and if you want to play it, you must give a positive answer on each one. The given questions are purely historical. In the same game, people can riot if they are unhappy with something like hygiene in town. In that moment you have many solutions. You could build aqueduct to prevent plaque, or some sort of church, because religion brings peace and consolation to the people. About learning history from *Sid Meier's Civilization* Kurt Squire wrote dissertation: *Replaying History: Learning World History through playing Civilization III* [6]. Here a role of religion must be mentioned in connection with the history of today: The priest can convert enemy or his building, but in atomic era religion loses its significance and the priest becomes a prophet with no influence (*Empire Earth*). There is also one new thing in strategy games. Now it is not needed to exterminate all and every one of the enemy graphical characters during the struggle. If general perish, moral can decrease and the army can leave battle field. Some historical events like wars and battles often make basis for shooting games (*First-person*, *Third-person*), e.g. *Medal of Honor*, *Call of Duty* and others. Those games are very realistic in few sections, e. g. in these shooting games the weapon or airplanes are presented very realistically and they were actually used in the II War World.

Historical facts also provide extensive fields of imagination for the creation of *point-and-click* genre of adventures. The solutions for these puzzle-kinds of games are closely connected with our historical knowledge. Thus, in an episode of the *Indiana Jones* serial situated in Hitler's time it is necessary to steal *Mein Kampf*, while in the game *Loch Ness* it is necessary to open safe-box using the code composed of numbers which represents the year of Scottish-French "Auld Alliance" concluded in the 1295/6 vs. England. The serial *Nancy Drew* is full of historical puzzles. It is designed not only for the young, but also for the adult, depending on game level. Consequently, in one of these adventures, a player has an opportunity to learn Roman numbers, and in Nancy's notebook, one can find the instruction how to recalculate on the easier level. In the game *Wanted: a Wild Western Adventure* you must take few books of Prehistory, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Middle Ages, Renaissance and Modern Era, put them on the bookshelf and click them by historical time line order.

The question "Is the historical fact trustworthy or not?" is a special issue. Today there are many critics of computer games. The games are proclaimed to be aggressive, bloody, politically oriented and also a kid can, even, learn how to kill a cop. However,

they are all a subject to historical criticism. If a historian takes a historical fact in its widest sense, whether it is a word, a picture, or something else, he often could not escape the impression that the truth is maybe changed. The example for the obvious mistake can be found in the above mentioned game *Loch Ness*, where on the safe-box stands the inscription *Anno Dominici* instead of *Anno Domini*. The problem in itself is the existence of the game's possibility not only to educate, but also to mislead a player. If in the game which takes place in Antic period of European history a player meets the maize or the usage of paper, especially younger players might think that these crops or goods then existed. There are many similar disinformations, given throughout the game in small, but important details. Thus, in the game *Age of Empire* Hittites have the best catapults, but their state is destroyed in the end of XIII century, and the strongest Greek troop has been named Centurion and that is a characteristic of Rome, not of Greek civilization. In *Rise of Rome* the Cartage navy use some sort of Greek fire, which is envelopment in the middle Ages 717–718. In *Empire Earth* you can use atomic bomb without any consequences, like radiation, except the more area is destroyed. In the *Civilization I* when you use it, the bomb has effects, like global warming of the planet. In more than one strategy there is another problem to solve: the walls and towers could fall in by regular troops or knights, no matter that they only can be destroyed by catapults and others war machines. And in *Wanted: A Wild Western Adventure* you can buy mobile phone, no matter it is a XIX century.³

The other problem, which is not of our concern now, is graphical presentation, because the information, given through picture and animation, could easily be misrepresented. In the beginning programmers had problem how to present the battle. They looked chaotic; troops did not come on in divisions. It's regulated in *Age of Kings* by using hot keys. In the earlier games special troops did not have advantage, e. g. bowman above infantry or cavalry above bowman, now spearman have advantage above cavalry. This was named stone-paper-sizer. The problem is in huge number of men. One unit is presented in hundred times smaller.

At the end, something of the contemporary criticisms is going to be mentioned. Dominating trend of using modern wars as games' topics could easily bring to life very bad influence on the contemporary notion and knowledge of historical events, like any other media. For example, stereotypes like those of bad German, or e.g. in game *Red Alert* Soviets have nuclear weapon which can destroy the planet, their partners Cubans track them with nuclear junk and the NATO has machine to create storms.

Because all above mentioned it is important to underline that the creation of history education games was founded. The first of them (hopefully that are only first of many): Making History™ series: *The Calm and the Storm*, quotes its creators: "an innovative new direction for multiplayer strategy games and unveils our strategy for bringing compelling, customizable interactive content to the classroom. The game uses Muzzy Lane's multiplayer gaming system software, which provides teachers with reporting and assignment tools, the ability to customize content to match curriculum needs etc." *The Calm and the Storm*, covers the causes and consequences of World War II. The game puts you in the role of a head of state, leading a struggling nation through challenges based on real historic events, using accurate historical data. Scripts focus on the key questions and challenges that nations faced at those times. For example in one of main scripts: *The End of Diplomacy*, key scenario questions and themes could

³ The additional examples are given at the end of this paper, see table (I).

be *Appeasement failed in Munich. Can German aggression be tempered or is war unavoidable?* and post-scenario discussion questions: *In the game, did alliances help countries? How and why? In reality, why did the UK and France agree to support Poland? Why did they declare war against Germany, but not send soldiers to help Poland? How does this compare to your game?* The same Muzzy Lane industry prepared another game, entitled: *Making History™: Revolution to Republic*, which focuses on events in North America between 1750 and 1877, and it will be available in fall 2005. *The Calm and the Storm* already tested in classrooms. "I've never seen so much energy in a history class before," says Professor Chris Mauriello of Salem State. "And not just the students. Even the Dean of the department stopped by to see what was going on. Kids were negotiating, laughing, talking, and debating. And it was all about history, not what band is playing this weekend." [7]. Also company called Caspian Learning completed a pilot. They have created a product where learning objectives from the UK national curriculum are delivered using games technology. "The reaction from students has been amazing with fantastic motivation levels and students competing against each other's scores, not even realizing the learning that this type of "immersive" learning environment brings" said one of its creators [8]. After all said about those games there is one more question. Is there enough entertainment for play? In the other way, students won't use them willingly.

[The appendix table](#)

Conclusion

We can not overlook the fact, that it would be most appropriate and useful, if computer games in general, should be supplied with some kind of additional historical reading or survey, at least on the elementary level. For example, *Shogun: Total War* introduces us to the history of Japan in XVI and XVII century, or game: Sid Meier's *Pirates*, which have some sort of encyclopedia, *Pirate-O-Pedia* about the history of Spanish, English, Dutch and French colonies, pirates, navigation, weaponry etc. in XVII century. It is important to input at the beginning a realistic historical base which can be incorporated as the truth by a timeline player by his own will and through choices made during game play, and in that way change the game's course. In this way, games can have historical educational character. And of course it will be nice if these abstracts can be written by historians. In the same time a cooperation would be good between historians and others specialists like mathematicians, computer designers, geographers etc. In this way, their special knowledge could be useful in process of changing the standard view on learning, and find mutual path that would unite sciences, like it was already shown in papers of historian Fernand Braudel, to create more educational games.

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