Directions of myth research in video games

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the identification of the main trends of myth research in video games. We have considered various approaches to defining the essence of myth. We suggest understanding myth as an inherent feature of the human consciousness that allows creating primary life meanings of an individual that are not questioned. There are two types of mythological reality construction that we distinguish here: mythmaking and mythodesign. We also suggest the following directions of myth research in video games: the study of mythodesign in video games; the analysis of archetypes usage, mythologems, mythological images, symbols and plots in video games; the study of mythological narrative construction features in video games; identification and analysis of mythological ideas shared by gaming communities and subcultures.

Keywords: Video game, game studies, myth, mythodesign, archetype, mythologem;

1. Introduction

The use of myth technologies in video games is significant today, not only for video game developers and for game studies, but also for society and modern culture in general. Presently, video games have a significant influence on the modern mass consciousness. Along with the mass media, cinematography, advertising and social media it is a way of forming values, behavioral patterns, and social interaction. Contemporary video game researchers note that "videogames should not only be viewed as an entertainment product as they have a great impact in society and many areas of life (such as education, military training, health, or security)" [5].

Video games are widespread today. They are an integral part of our lives. According to ESA's Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry report, 65 percent of American households are home to someone who plays video games regularly; gamers aged 18 or older represent 72 percent of the video game-playing population, and the average gamer is 35 years old [4]. More and more video games are showing positive effects [8]. Today we see the need to analyze and study video games, how they affect the human psyche, behavior, attitude to the world and communication with other people.

On one hand, video games represent the dominant values of modern culture, but on the other hand, they form values, stereotypes and attitudes: affect the worldview of people, their preferences and choices, opinion and behavior. Behind any video game there is a specific view of the world [9]. Video games can create new meanings and values, which are shared by gaming communities

and integrated into our reality through cosplay, fanfics, etc. Video games generate virtual worlds with hyperreal images [1].

Video games simulate numerous virtual worlds, plunging into which a person starts to identify the image of reality with reality itself. Such identification is a feature of the mythological world perception. Therefore, the study of myth in video games today is a significant research problem, which opens a new direction in game studies. How is myth presented in video games? The purpose of this article is to determine the main directions of studying myth in video games.

2. Myth Essence

First of all, we have to define the concept of "myth". By now, lots of ways to interpret the myth nature have been discovered:

- comparative analysis based on typological comparison of myth with other cultural forms (F. Schelling, J.F. Lafitau);
- linguistic theory based on the analysis of the myth metaphorical structure (M. Muller, A. Potebnya);
- evolutionism, in the framework of which, mythology was treated as animism and was interpreted as anachronism in modern culture (E. Tylor);
- ritualistic concept – myth research from the perspective of ritual actions represented in it (J. Frazer, D. Harris);
- sociological research of myth being regarded as a mechanism of cultural tradition and maintaining of social order (E. Durkgeim, B. Malinovskiy, L. Levy-Bruhl);
- psychoanalytical tradition, which views myth as expression of individual and collective unconscious (S. Freud, K. Jung, J. Campbell);
- structuralistical research of myth as a logical tool used to resolve cultural contradictions (C. LeviStrauss);
- semiotic concept – myth is viewed as "secondary semiological system" (R. Barthes);
- symbolical paradigm studies myth as autonomous symbolical form of culture (E. Cassirer);
- interpretation of myth as numinous experience (K. Hubner, M. Eliade) [10].

We understand myth as a phenomenon of the consciousness, as the primary space of life meanings, which is not questioned. And it becomes the basis for the formation of a coherent picture of the world. Myth is an inalienable property of the human consciousness, therefore, it exists not only in the past, but in any historical era, including today. Myth is a fundamental anthropological category, which plays the main role in modern culture, realizing cognitive, ideological, value-related, social and regulative functions [6].

Myth creates a system of coordinates for perception and understanding of the surrounding reality and gives it sacred meanings. Myth is the basis of human adaptation in the world; it is the initial understanding and reality structuring. Myth implies emotional involvement of a person in their own space, the inseparability of a part and the whole, the image of reality and reality itself. In the process of reality cognition the human consciousness inevitably comes to the formation of the world image based on the mythological experience and comprehension of reality.

Archaic mythological consciousness was not able to go beyond the existing worldview system. A significant trend of the modern consciousness, in our view, is constructing various kinds of mythological worlds and staying in them. Therefore, today the possibilities for myth construction in many spheres of social life as advertising, politics, science, art, video games are almost limitless.

There are two types of technology for such reality construction. The first type is mythmaking. It is a spontaneous process of giving reality sacred meanings in which the myth-maker does not reveal oneself. The second type is mythodesign – conscious and purposeful endowing of various aspects of being with mythological properties; it based on the chain "creator-customer-consumer of myths".

3. Mythodesign

The term "mythodesign" was introduced by A. Ulyanovskiy [11]. Mythodesign is an activity of creating social myths. It is a rationalized technology for creating mythological structures that have an author's meaning and are intended to be perceived by a certain target audience. In fact, mythodesign is a special method of building the system of ideas about the world. Designed with the help of this method social myths are to encourage consumers to change their opinion, emotions or behavior in a certain way.

Any consciousness today is influenced by many disparate myths. Mythodesign technologies create meanings and images that are perceived as the only possible picture of the world. With the help of mythodesign a space of sacred meanings for "living in myth" is constructed. The consumer perceives this constructed myth as a part of reality. As soon as the consumer finds the opportunity to look at the myth from the outside and critically perceive and comprehend it, the process of demystification begins, which is the release from the power of the existing myth.

Mythodesign technologies have a manipulative impact on the mass consciousness. They are used to structure social perception of a subject, service, goods or events. Mythodesign is a rationalized technology of constructing meanings, symbols, and images that sets behavior patterns of the target audience needed. With the help of mythodesign modern myths are created. A. Ulyanovskiy determines them as contextually conditionally true and axiologically trustworthy utterances. Mythodesign is used in branding and advertising as a tool aimed at satisfying the needs of a person living in myth that arise in the process of mass communication. It helps creating the assumptions of the target audience about a certain brand, product or service.

Compared to mythmaking mythodesign is purposeful, pragmatic, authentic, and elaborate in terms of affecting the target audience. However, like mythmaking, mythodesign acts as a tool of cultural space creation, forming a system of ideas about the world and the place of human in it. It also establishes social relations and harmonizes the inner world of people.

4. Myth and video games

Today, researchers pay particular attention to how video games reflect the values of the societies in which they were created [3]. Myth in video games can form a certain worldview, satisfy needs, change values and patterns of behavior. In video games a virtual world is created purposefully, plunging into which a person uncritically perceives certain statements and messages as true in a given context. Therefore, the study of the myth techniques in video games is a significant task.

In this article, we propose to highlight the following possible directions of the myth study in video games:

Firstly, we can explore mythodesign in video games as a way of creating and translating meanings for people living in myth, which they perceive as the reality of their life world. Study of mythodesign in video games is revealed by: analysis of a video game visual language; analysis of the target audience needs reflected in a video game; analysis of the myth representation context in

a video game; analysis of the mythological argumentation in the video game (use of conditionally true arguments which are perceived as naturally true).

Secondly, we can analyze conscious or unconscious appeal of video game developers to mythologems and archetypes, as well as the use of mythological subjects, fragments of archaic and classical mythologies, images of heroes and gods, mythological symbols. For example, in video games we can find the use of different archetypes: the mother, the warrior, the Golden age, the sage, Trinity, the circle and various mythologems, such as tower, bridge, eyes, water, etc. Images of chthonic creatures, beasts and monsters of ancient mythologies are actively used in video games. The monomyth analysis [2] and the changing image of a protagonist can be studied separately.

Thirdly, we can explore how video games tell stories and create their own interpretation of certain historical events. For example, the video game "Assassin's Creed Unity" forms its own mythological narration about the Great French Revolution [7]. It is interesting to study the peculiarities of the mythological narrative and chronotope construction in video games. We can also identify and explore the techniques of myth that allow us to create a special imagery and symbolism in video games, for example, the bricolage technique, the law of mystical participation, causality violation, the explanation of the world through the arche and the sphere of the numinous, sacred, etc.

Fourthly, the analysis of video games as a phenomenon of modern culture can be a significant area of research. Images created by video games are embodied in our reality by means of cosplay, role playing games, fandom, etc. In this aspect, it is possible to study mythological representations shared by gaming communities and subcultures.

5. Conclusion

In our opinion, the main difference between the myth of the archaic epoch and its modern embodiment is that a person is influenced by many myths that simultaneously coexist in modern culture. The life-world of a modern person is filled with various myths. The meanings and images of our reality are deliberately constructed by mythodesigners with the help of mass communication, advertising, social media, etc. Video games and virtual worlds they generate also have a significant impact on the mass consciousness. We can explore video games from various points of view, as digital media, as art, as a narrative, as a cultural phenomenon, etc. One of the most promising research areas can be myth study in video games.

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