

INNOVATIVE GAME GENRES: SOCIOLOGICAL GAMES

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Introduction

In the last decades, the game scene has changed irreversibly: thousands of new game titles are been produced every year. Game industry is on the top of growth rate among cultural industries. However, and strangely enough, **game genres** and **styles** suffer from a lack of innovation and changed in a very lower rythm along the very history of digital games.

An interesting critique on the nature of games and about the necessity of changing our game design rules and sensibility was done by Mary Flanagan (2009). My own reserach considers this experimental and social posture. E.g. we constructed a new breed of the so-called 'serious' and 'educational' games, aiming to allow not just the learning, but the practice of Sociology, that can be called **Sociological Games**. In other words, Sociological Games can be defined as games that reflect deeply on the very nature of social life, while playing with it. The following examples present some possibilities and prototypes in this direction.

1. Trichotomies game.

This game was developed within a **project** entitled *Public Communication of Art: the case of Local/global Museums*, that received financial support from the Foundation for Science and Technology-Lisbon, Portugal, and was conducted in partnership with several cultural institutions at

Lisbon and other Portuguese cities: Museum Collection Berardo, Institute of Museums and Conservation, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Serralves Foundation, etc..

The project was a collective work, carried out in 2 main and articulated directions:

Firstly, a **sociological analysis of cultural publics** involved in **public communication of art** within physical and virtual museums. This process implicates the production, distribution, consumption and understanding of art in urban contexts. I.e, it assumes that art is a communicative and social phenomenon, requiring, in addition to artists and 'art gatekeepers', an 'active audience', who reproduces mass media and cultural institutions, but also transforms them.

Secondly, a **digital multitouch table** was implemented. This is an intermedia device for the interactive consultation of art works within public museums, which was presented at artist Joana Vasconcelos exhibition, at Berardo Museum, Lisbon, from 1 March to 18 May 2010.

The main objectives of this module were to allow visitors to use this table to play with the artists works, through **textual and visual networks**, a **multitouch questionnaire** and a '**trichotomies game**'. Trichotomies are constellations of 3 articulated concepts.

In particular, the table allowed the following uses:

- Enable the visitors to **interact and play**, alone or in groups. The aim was to generate discussions among visitors about the artworks displayed, allowing the public to contribute with its knowledge and opinions by making comments about every artwork.

- Build a **network of meanings** constituted by the common knowledge of visitors, by assigning tags (common keywords) to artworks;

- Collect, from the playful interaction of users, critical information to the mentioned **sociological study**.

During interaction, visitors activated a surface / touch pad with **multi-touch technology**, that allows them to: see videos, photos and texts about each artwork; write comments about the exhibition in a digital guestbook; read the comments of other users; assign custom tags to artworks, establish a

collective and social network of connections between the artworks on display; consult the links weaved among artworks, in a tag by tag basis.

All the information originated by user interaction *in situ*, was available as well **online**, inside a platform very similar to the interface used in the exhibition space.

In short, publics at the museum can act as **cultural gamers**, to learn art and develop their cultural citizenship, and, by so doing, to allow sociological studies both on culture and gaming.

2. GeoNeoLogical Novel's game.

This is a novel that acts as in three main ways:

(a) as an **experimental literary work**;

(b) as a **methodological device** for analyzing social processes through literature;

(c) and as a **sociological game** for teaching sociology.

What is proposed here is assumedly a different novel, in an era when the network of almost all networks, and in particular digital social networks, blogs and other devices emerging at **Web 2.0** and **Web 3.0**, have radically changed our system of production and fruition of meanings and knowledge.

This novel name, 'GeoNeoLogic novel', witnesses the three main dimensions that underlie it: **space** (denoted by the prefix **geo**); time, specially the diachrony of innovation (**neo**); and the communicative relationship maintained among the **social subjects** involved, such as the **author**, the **reader** and the **social actors** that they both are. This relation is presented by the term **logos**, a Greek word which means 'language', 'discourse', 'reason', etc.).

In addition, this novel can be included in the genre of **Transmediatic Literature**. Such fiction style is understood as literature that is not fixed in one medium, but in several, not being exclusively characteristic of any of them. In so doing, transmediatic literature acquires an hybrid and nomadic nature, founded on and melting within the social fabric that produces and reproduces it. Such an hybrid and intercultural novel can't be perceived without its

communicative, participatory, relational and reticular pedestals. Hence, this style of novel allows various ways to be read by a reader (who also can transform himself into a co-author), within the following **modes of writing / reading**: fiction and meta-information mode; interactive mode; social and sociological mode; and critical-informative mode.

The (first) author can insert himself in a new form of critique of literature, a **Self-Criticism** included inside the book he offers.

In sum, GeoNeoLogic novel is a new genre by itself; in another words, it constitutes an example of the **Literary Transmeditation Genre**. In fact, in addition to this novel presented in a book or **Book Novel**, GeoNeoLogic novel may take the form of an **Ebook Novel**, a **Movie Novel**, a **Web 3 Novel** or a **Mobile Novel**. All these versions include gamable instruments that allow to play it in very diverse ways.

More details on these experimental games can be found at Andrade, 2011; 2014.

3. Conclusion: cultural games for cultural gamers?

A proliferation of new game sub-genres includes not just Trichotomies Game and GeoNeoLogical Novel game within **Sociological Games** considered as a broad game genre.

Besides that, **Hybrid Games** are Sociological games that hybridize or mashup other games' genres. An example is the fusion of a 'Whac-a-Mole' game, hybridized with a **Satirical Game**. This last one is about a real and controversial public person, who may be criticized by the game and used in ethical and social ways by the gamer.

All the precedent examples constitute new ways of playing with intermedia devices at several urban spaces and scapes. In particular, one of those social places, museums, by using educational and sociological games, may contribute, in a determinant way, to develop public communication of art within **cultural gamers**.

It is expected that this innovative trend will pursuit, in order to transform gaming in a more useful activity, not just remaining in the limited territory of leisure, but as well blending this playful arena with the cybrespace/cybertime

inherent to work contexts, like universities, firms and every professional activity active within the contemporary social scene.

Bibliography

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