

The Aesthetic View of Digital Games: Following the Concept of Heidegger's Art Theory

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Abstract

The general perception of digital games is negative because of their various disturbances. In fact, games are valuable tools by which producers express their intentions regarding the design of commercial goods or artwork. Many people believe that digital games should never be accepted as art forms, even though many artists use this technology in diverse ways. Others who recognize the artistic merit in digital games present their reasons sensibly. In this paper, we approached this subject through the concept of art as a language, and we found logical reasons for acknowledging games as art forms according to the phenomenological view. Based on Heidegger's art theory, art is construed as poetry; thus, we focused on this concept. Languages are distinguishable by the use of ordinary words in general conversations and artistic words in poetry. The major point is that games could be considered as poetic expressions; therefore, they are referred to as poetic games. First, core features of poetic art were extracted based on Heidegger. Second, some linguistic factors were listed based on the sensorium commonly used during game playing. A basis to evaluate poetic games was designed for these two aspects. In addition, the standpoints are supported by analyzed examples. Thus, the study indicates that understanding games theoretically or academically will contribute to cultural development.

Keywords: art, language, Heidegger, game art, poetic game

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate digital games from the aesthetic perspective. The research is derived from Heidegger's theory of art. From his phenomenological concept, we extracted specific elements of art and categorized certain items to assess games' artistic value, based on the position that games can be classified in a language category. These items reflect how the elements of games perform artistic roles. Further, these views are supported with analyzed examples. This approach is not for insisting that all games are art forms or for establishing an absolute standard to judge games. It is a proposal to submit that game media should be considered art platforms.

Related Researches

Several standards have been used to assess games. They were designed to present objective judging points. Standards can be classified into three types according to purpose. The most common one, based on academic studies, is for measuring

usability of gameplay. It considers user experience (UX) with dimensions such as heuristics, cognition, etc. Another standard is for deciding a game authoring tool's usefulness in terms of both hardware and software. The other is a rating system for controlling the playable age in educational terms. These categories assess games how they are acceptable technologically or suitable to play for many people, but there is no basis for evaluating games' own contents and artistic merits.

Terms to describe artistic games are defined in the context of digital art. Art game, art mod, and game art are words for academic classifications, according to Tiffany Holmes and Rebecca Cannon [1] [2]. They are sorted by their final forms, whether as games or artworks. There is confusion over words in that digital games are being treated as media art, not as games themselves, though many researchers have extended the range of games as art based on several theoretical concepts [3] [4]. Most researchers who understand games to be tools of art are studying to stretch the expression of media art [5]. In addition, other studies focus on the subjects of games, such as what artistic games say about artificial life or virtual reality.

Artworks: A Form of Language

It is difficult to investigate how games are valuable as self-contained media and how they function to show art thoroughly with earlier studies, which are biased toward certain techniques. Artistic games have elements of both games and art. In this paper, the newly coined term "poetic game" is used to focus on the individual artistry in games.

As previously mentioned, this idea is from Heidegger, the representative existentialist in Germany. He asserted that art is a kind of language and that it also could be classified as poetry hypostatistically. Artworks present real or unreal objects and they are recognized as artistic media when substance is delivered effectively to recipients. The result of this type of communication is the delivery of varied information to viewers from either well-designed intentions of producers or coincidence. Following this view of representationalism, Heidegger's linguistic peculiarities could be regarded as sensible, though his theory does not imply that all linguistic or communicative activities are art forms. There are obvious differences between artistic and inartistic language.

Languages are distinguishable based on usage of ordinary words in general conversations and poetic words in poetry. Poetic language can be characterized as connotative. It is poly-semantic with unique ambiguities because it forms meanings with accumulated diverse messages. Ambiguity is generated from the language's abundant impact on the senses

but it does not mean alack of clarity or abstruseness. Poetic language carries precise and detailed information during the self-generating process. The attribute of a piece of art, as a language, resembles the ambiguity of poetic words. Art linguistically reveals entities, and artworks collectively represent a language emerging from artistic activities.

Features of Poetic Language

Being (*das Sein*) of beings (*das Seiender*) are inherent in a composition. Though some could view depictions as representations of meaningless things, they should not be accepted as such because artworks are objects of the aesthetic experience (*ästhetisches Erlebnis*). Heidegger explained readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) with *A Pair of Shoes* by Vincent van Gogh. A pair of shoes shows Being of equipment (*das Zeug*) with an interpretation of every being, which indicates existence. This concept is concerned with the reliability of the equipment, and the process of retrieving through the surrounding world is derived from clarity caused by linguistic ambiguity. Viewers are the beings (*Dasein*) who exist in the inexperienced world where the truth is being in the moment when they encounter the unique language of the paint. Thus, artworks must not just mimic the extent of being but they must also offer the place (*das Offene*) where the truth (*aletheia*) of the being can correct itself in the works. In addition, those places appear when “coveredness” (*Verbergung*) and “uncoveredness” (*Entbergung*) are balanced in communication between transmitters and receivers [6].

The context of art can be divided into the meaning of contents and the formation of expression. These two parts have overlapping attributes. The details of each should be different but their implied duality is similar. They can be understood with opposing words—“spread” and “gather.” They adhere to the same context of coveredness and uncoveredness, according to Heidegger. Table 1 describes characteristic features that we can notice in balanced art regardless of its form.

Table 1: Character of art: division of meaning and formation

	<i>Spread</i>	<i>Gather</i>
Meaning	poly-semantic paradoxical contradictory	Implicative moderate symbolic
Formation	Ungrammatical illogical	Regular formal

Linguistic Approach in Games

Narratology and Ludology

Games have been studied according to competing aspects in narratology and ludology. Basically, narratologists emphasize immanent attributes of games by embracing them in epic narrative texts. However, ludologists attend to the regularity, playfulness, and patterns of players’ actions. There are critical limitations in both cases: narratology does not consider properties of media, nor does it have a qualifying methodology to analyze; ludology overlooks the potential of the explanation, which is exposed in narrative structure. Espen Aarseth, a narratologist, said the factor of playfulness could be admitted for the approach he advocates, and Janet Murray, a

ludologist, said the narrative view could be adopted in the linguistic approach she supports. However, these two academicians still could not find middle ground, even though both agreed on the coexistence of certain aspects.

There is no static meaning in the text of a game. The narrative construction of a game consistently changes based on the players’ control; thus, this medium can be distinguished from other media. Obviously, games can be apprehended as being in some way analogous to literature, movies, and paintings—the basis of bilateral interacting material. It is no wonder that a creative way to evaluate games is needed. Interactive digital media tell stories with expansion and reproduction; the freedom from restraints ensures that they never have to establish a beginning or an end. Gamers unravel the narrative structure flexibly by using various interfaces such as the keyboard, mouse, or external console. Ignoring performers causes fatal mistakes in analyzing game narratives. Ludology emerged to overcome this weakness, and researchers built several categories and models to explain games.

To contain games in the field of art, the linguistic potential of games should be sensed. In most cases, games have narrativity, and they meet the requirements of communicating effectively with participating players. It suggests that analyses of signification and experiential effects should be conducted jointly to accept games as a language. When games are regarded as texts semiologically, this type of investigation is possible.

Linguistic Factors of Games

In terms of semiology, artworks must be regarded as signs. An investigation must be preceded with an examination regarding how this medium commands its own language to reveal the poetic features in games. This methodology could be used to identify initial indicators of poetic language in games.

Table 2: Linguistic factors in games

Languages in Game	Factors	Descriptions
Visual language	color	Visually sensed texts. Visual language is the factor that decides the major appearance of games.
	shape	
	texture	
Auditory language	rhythm	Auditorily sensed texts. Recognize by rhythm and melody of harmonized background music and sound effects.
	melody	
Tactile language	direct	Tactually sensed texts. Directly sensed by contacting physical interface and indirect tactual experience through playing games.
	indirect	
Literal language	text	All of literal texts.

To examine games as poetry, some elements were picked up based on game design factors [7]. They are categorized largely by how they are sensed. If a game is a language, it is spoken through sensory organs, not in common ways. Sight, hearing, touch, and letters are used in today’s games.

Although a letter is not a sensory organ, it can be recognized as a sensitive language because it can be accepted without an extra interpretativestep. In the case of analyzing games only with these language elements, the result of the investigation would have errors. The reason for errors isafragmentary analysis standard by which denotation is applied only in the process of semiotic interpretation; therefore, it could be arranging only a primary level of signification.The problem can be solved byanalyzingcases with criteria that combinelinguistic elements of games and the poetic character of art. According to a balance between spreading and gatheringfor meaning and formation, poetic games and common games will be differentiated.

Analyzing Poetic Games

Case selection is threefold. First, a gamecould be considered art if it is rated as havinguninstructive content. Second, a gamecould be art if it is popular or commercial. Third, it is considered art if it is already evaluatedas an artistic game by critics. *Bioshock*has beenrated “M”by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) and 18 byboth thePan European Game Information (PEGI) andKorean Game Rating andAdministration Committee. *Child of Light* isdistributed in the PS3 platform and it is classified as a role-playing game(RPG). *Journey* won the Game of the Year (GOTY) award in 2013 and receivedfavorable comments from many celebrated critics.

Table 3:Case analysis

<i>Bioshock</i>		Meaning		Formation	
		spread	gather	spread	gather
visual language	color		✓	✓	
	shape		✓		✓
	texture		✓		✓
auditory language	rhythm	✓			✓
	melody		✓		✓
tactile language	direct	✓			✓
	indirect		✓	✓	
literal language	text	✓		✓	
<i>Child of Light</i>		Meaning		Formation	
		spread	gather	spread	gather
visual language	color		✓	✓	
	shape		✓	✓	
	texture		✓	✓	
auditory language	rhythm		✓	✓	
	melody		✓	✓	
tactile language	direct	✓			✓
	indirect		✓	✓	
literal language	text	✓		✓	
<i>Journey</i>		Meaning		Formation	
		spread	gather	spread	gather
visual language	color		✓	✓	
	shape		✓	✓	
	texture		✓	✓	
auditory language	rhythm		✓	✓	
	melody		✓	✓	

tactile language	direct	✓			✓
	indirect		✓	✓	
literal language	text		✓	✓	

The above cases are evaluatedaccording tostandardsforpoetic games. The poetic image in poetic games is not only determinedby its beautyof expression butalso when its linguistic character is understood.Regarding meaning, “spread” is poly-semantic, paradoxical, and contradictory in character, whereas “gather” is implicative, moderate, and symbolic in character. In formation, the former is ungrammatical andillogical in character, whereas the latter is regular andformal in character. If each attributeseems opposed to the other, it can be understood as a balanced poetic language.

Conclusion

Case studies reveal that poetic games have a certain tendency to gather semantically and spread formatively. “Poetic”canbe appliedto thegames because of the several strategies employed to block the reckless prolificnatureof digital media.The suggestion that games can be considered collectively as an art form is verified by analyzing several games aspoetic games. Thus, a step has been taken to createa new vision in whichgame media have artistic value. This study differs from others in that ithas originality, demonstrated by the suggestion ofan unusual method forinterpreting games by exploring the origin of art.Criteria for a poetic game can be established by referring to elements of artworks characterized as poetic art.The concept couldbe developed further by considering the tendency to eitherspread orgather from the narrative and game language.This research does not insist that every game is art. Its aim is to find a certain position for digital games in the field of art.

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