

*[THE
MULTIPLEXITY OF
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The Multiplexity of Narrative in Game Design

The continual development of video games within contemporary societies also perpetuates the ways in which they are studied from theoretical perspectives. Examining the ways in which game design has evolved to better fit with the shift of digital media, plays an exceptional role in understanding the factors which are represented and signified in storylines. The controversial debate of narratology and ludology since has been settled in the fact that both concepts are needed in order to bridge the storylines of video games and the by-product of these intertwined theorizations. The conceptualization of narration within video games is contested as complex and needs examinations from a multitude of aspects in order to comprehend the multiplexity of narrative within games, and the cause and effects of such. In specific, the developers Rockstar Games and Ubisoft, draw on ground-breaking narratives for games such as: Grand Theft Auto Five and Assassins Creed: Two and synthesize real-world locations in order to develop their environmental settings. Though Grand Theft Auto Five and Assassins Creed: Two curate their own spatial stories, their individualistic narrative experiences axiomatically immerse users in greater interactivity.

To begin, the narratives of GTAV and AC2 draw parallels from real life environmental settings to spark further user immersion. The narrative development then becomes a multi-layered gaming experiences that goes beyond just following the plot but developing factors in which would pinpoint the gaming characters attitudes, dress, music and activities to their exact

locations at their time period in reality. Within GTAV the storyline revolves around the reality of three interchangeable characters Michael, Trevor and Franklin accumulating the most amount of wealth and possessions within the virtual confines of a map of *Los Santos* which's infrastructure, setting and architecture heavily relies on the cultural paradigm of Los Angeles contemporarily. The environmental parallels drawn from the real city's architecture, depicts that the game heavily relies on this medium of narrative to be an aspect their users yearn to explore, virtually. The significance is that the gaming experience goes beyond following one character, and storyline and the addition of exploration features beyond missions is an additive to this factor and users become captivated with the adjacency of the map of *Los Santos* to Los Angeles. This is also explored in AC2, one of the trilogies of the series where the protagonist Ezio explores the Renaissance period of Italy with its riveting connection and landscape of the environment at that time. Amy M. Green emphasizes this aspect within *Storytelling in Video Games: The Art of the Digital Narrative*, "One key method by which digital narratives facilitate a players immersion lies in the crafting of the games fictional world and its environment" (40). The emphasis on both these narratives is that they've selected precise locations with environmental settings in which users want to explore, as if they were in reality there during the historical or contemporary time period. It develops an everlasting effect of the narrative as it cannot be shifted with external factors of time and space because it is so correct with its placement and setting for that exact period. Thus, the significance then becomes that users are immersed in a space in which aren't affected by external or internal factors of change to their narrative and can be cyclically consumed. Exploring this specifically within GTAV, Andri Gerber's, Ulrich Götz *Architectonics of Game Spaces* describes this conception, "this holds true for all of the activities one can execute in a video game, from driving a car to running through the manifold spatial landscapes

one can act upon” (136). User immersion is an intertwined aspect to narrative development. As Andri Gerber mentions the space in which is created for the user emulates reality and the goals of the experience is not simply reduced to the experience of the story but the innovative capabilities in which the narration can be explored beyond the confined space of the storyline and a landscape to freely explore. It allows users to act as if they are in control of the narrative, though the mechanical aspects still restrict to the specificity of the virtual map. This can also be explored within AC2 and the ways in which it incorporates the Renaissance time period to create greater user immersion. Amy Green also depicts this as, “immersion takes on added dimensions in games such as those of the Assassins Creed series as narrative becomes inherently twined with place” (43). What becomes complex within this gameplay is that it is multi-layered narrative. The significance of this aspect is that it allows users to immerse in a game space with two protagonists all while experiencing it at a time period in which fits to the situation. Here it is evident that design organization has narratological consequences and that the user immersion is a consequence of spatial design being created (Jenkins 12). Therefore, the narratives for both games is based around character movement and this consequently allows users to go beyond plot and strict storyline, which allows users to feel authoritative to their actions.

Furthermore, the cross-wiring of narratology and ludology furthers an overall interactive experience within GTAV and AC2. To begin, within GTAV the intertwined connection between ludology and narratology is a significant aspect in which sculpt the space in which players feel familiarity to their experience and actively participate within. The culture of *los Santos* is ingrained within the gameplay and consequently effects all aspects. As Trent Hergenrader discusses in his, *Gaming World Building and Narrative*, “shaping a story from three distinct yet related components: character, plot and setting.” (104). The written and mechanical development

of narrative goes far beyond a simple plot and following that sequentially. The characters and setting can also be controlled by users which is ingrained within GTAV to develop further interactivity, which bridges the conception of narration and ludology. Users are given the option to follow gameplay to complete missions and follow character development simultaneously, as to showcase cause and effect within the narration can be from narratological cues or user decisions. The game then consequently becomes a space that has worldly features as in the characters have to support family's, have *jobs* and overall wealth accumulate in order to succeed in the course of the gameplay. Therefore, the space becomes further than a story, its bridges the concept of creating a cultural uproar in the spatial setting. GTAV is unique in its narrative development where players expect the spatial setting to be a specific way, for them to pre-plan their experience which axiomatically allows players to be immersed in a setting before even having to play, interconnecting the concept of decision/control-process to the narrative. Within the case of AC2, users are given a space in which they can quickly familiarize themselves with the touch of exploration factors. The significance of this is immense because it develops discussion of the multitude of ways for this gameplay in gaming culture and sparks further interest in its correlation to reality. Connecting to this, Henry Jenkins in his, *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*, states, "choices about the design and organization of game spaces have narratological consequences. In the case of evoked narratives, spatial design can either enhance our sense of immersion within a familiar world or communicate a fresh perspective on that story through the altering of established details (Jenkins 12). This allows players to jump across the setting, interact with characters in the city of Rome and overall shape a narrative of their choice, all within the mechanical confined of the actuality of the narrative of itself. It is apparent that mechanics and storyline development must play hand in hand to bridge user experience further,

because the user must follow the confines of the spatial setting but, also undertake character development simultaneously beyond the narrative. Enhancing features that are far beyond plot and storyline such as: interaction tools, multiplayer features allows users to play in a lucid framework and indulge in an experience they feel isn't so restricted to the narrative of cause and effect follow play. Thus, the cross-wiring of ludology and narratology though opposing perspectives in game design are required to interconnect in gameplays for GTAV and AC2 in order to develop depth and complexity for users to cyclically explore.

Moreover, the unique narrative developments of both storylines in GTAV and AC2 develop the magic circle. The technical aspects in which game developers curate also develops the space in which they want users to enter the gameplay and how they ought to interact with the space. As Juul discusses within *The Magic Circle and the Puzzle Piece*, with the *Three Frames for Every Game Action* the frames as followed: frame 1: the game as goal orientation, frame 2: the game as experience, frame 3: for management of social situation.(61).The gameplay becomes a multidimensional space where virtual reality is consumed as worldly experiences. The significance of this is emphasized when Juul discusses, "Seen this way, the magic circle is a straightforward phenomenon in which players decide to play and by consent enter into the special social and psychological space of a game" (58). The interconnection of space and setting within GTAV is that players enter virtual spheres which become greatly familiar as if they are in reality in those spaces. Within GTAV, players begin to connect with space, setting and characterization to the point where they do not need to follow the map within the gameplay to understand where they can travel or question the ways in which they can interact within the space. The cross-wiring of the magic circle then becomes a mechanical and experiential aspect in which users can immerse themselves within. Moving forward to AC2 the magic circle within this

narrative is developed as a connection to a historical context. The significance of the magic circle and the connectivity of narrative is that the virtual space is not one that creates a Utopian outcome to the gameplay. This consequentially allows the magic circle to create parallels from reality so that users feel a sense of connectivity to real life situations of conflict in the gameplay. The magic circle, then becomes a basis in which players want to emerge themselves within, but, the mechanics of the narrative shapes the extent to how far the user can progress. Continuing with this aspect, the multiplayer features within both these spaces allow players to enact in cyclical actions in the gameplay and ultimately be fully immersed within the magic circle. As Juul furthers his discussion with the existential theorization of the magic circle, “The discussion of the magic circle is yet another upset it is a straightforward theoretical move to deny boundaries, but in games we find players (Juul 64). Players are given a multitude of options to design and act in any ways as they please, within the course of the narrative boundaries. This consequently demonstrates that though given an option to act in ways that a player pleases, that the boundaries are still in place. Exemplifying this is that players have the freedom to act in ways they wish such as: violence, the ways in which they accumulate wealth, customizing a house, car and interacting with others. The environmental setting is a parrel of the worldly actions interconnecting narratology and ludology which heightens the existence of the magic circle as a pre-fixed aspect to the game. The boundaries in themselves then become up to the player as to how far they want to interact and immerse themselves and the magic circle axiomatically becomes an aspect that is theorized in order for narrative development to take place. The magic circle in this instance is that user immersion is an experience that is parallel to a similar reality. In the gameplay of AC2 the similarity in which players immerse themselves within the virtual reality of a character, the features in which you can interact within the game can be seen to have

hyperbolic interactions as from reality. This comments on the ways in which the magic circle then becomes an escape from reality in which players choose to immerse themselves within and experience a specific narrative individually. The magic circle then becomes versatile to the spatial setting in which the storyline takes place and carries this throughout the gameplay. Therefore, these metagames become parallels with life and are played accordingly by players to achieve more than winning but, a maintenance of social situations within the play.

The unique narratives in which Grand Theft Auto Five and Assassins Creed: Two design varying spatial stories allow greater user immersion. The narratives go beyond plot and storytelling to affix parallels from worldly locations in order to develop a greater sense of space and setting for users. This becomes a large aspect in the interconnection of ludology and narratology where the experience exceeds follow through gameplay but is controlled into the exploration of the narration which develops an in-depth interest to captivation of the gameplay for users. The everlasting shift of game design within the digital age allow narratives to expand beyond the yearn to win and emerge a desire to sculpt virtual worlds to explore. The theoretical perspectives in which enhance the knowledge of game design advances the developing, engineering and programming of video games in contemporary societies.

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