Games and the Imagination

Part One: The Primacy of the Imagination

By Richard Dare

Introduction

Can you remember when you discovered video games? I can, and I don't think that my experience was much different from others who discovered games at around the same age. At nine years old I was not a logical child, technical matters were beyond me and by the standards of today I was probably the least likely person to be interested in computers but I was completely entranced by the idea of video games. Years before I got my first computer, I would make my father take me round computer shops to look at the games on offer. You probably remember the outlandish descriptions of the games on the back of the boxes, "You are Earth's last hope! Destroy the evil Zarg Empire before it wipes out humanity!" Or, "Brave the terrors of the Forest of Auria and rescue the beautiful princess!" Of course, to the trained eye, the Zarg empire was a number of small blocky shapes that stuttered across the screen, and the Forest of Auria was either a collection of ASCII characters or a short text description, but to the young mind that read these descriptions, video games were a gateway to the kinds of experiences previously only offered by dreams, books and cinema, the closest you could get to living in a fantasy world.

For me, the attraction was the promise that these games held, through their themes, characters and perspectives; the promise that a young child could explore in safety and daylight the shadowy and indistinct mental world that imposed itself on him at night. They removed the clumsy limitations of toys, the dissatisfaction that came with increasing age of realising that the dark alleyway on the corner of his housing estate was not the entrance to the world of ghosts. They satisfied his desire to return there even after he was told it did not exist.

Three years ago I was working on a design that I hoped would speed my journey into the games industry. I was thinking deeply about games and was frustrated with the tendency of the industry and the games press to talk about games only in what I call constructional terms; that is, in terms of the technical elements that make up a game such as 3D engine, AI etc. What I wanted were words that I could use to describe the *experience*. Despite spending hours poring through games magazines, websites and interviews I could find little referring to the experience of playing, except perhaps for playability, a term which by its vagueness proves that there has been little insight into the subjective experience of playing games.

I kept being drawn to a particular memory and had an urge to explore it, so I sat at my computer and wrote the two paragraphs that begin this article. I wanted to continue, to elaborate on this memory only to realise that I knew nothing more. But somewhere in this memory, I thought, there might be a key to a deeper understanding of games and a widening of the language we use to discuss them. So I began a personal quest to find out everything I could about subjective experience, fantasy and imagination, a quest culminating in the writing of this series, which I hope is of use and interest to gamers and developers alike.

The first step I took was to explore the games media and talk to as wide a cross section of gamers as I could, in order to see if there were any commonalties between my personal reflections and the experience of others. This research could not be called scientific by any means, but the questions and experiences I tried to explore are, I think, essential to any understanding of video games. Little is achieved by psychologists merely asking the simplistic question of whether games are good or bad for us, and the contradictory results of several studies bears this out. What is far more important is to ask, without judgement, how an individual relates to a game, to explore questions of personal meaning and

imaginative response. Whatever the value of my investigations, I became convinced that an exploration of fantasy and personal meaning could lead to an opening up of the way that we think about and design games.

Widening the Language of Convention

Over the years, the games industry has evolved an impressive language of terms to describe games. This language has two main strands: genre terminology and technical (or constructional) terminology. Genre terminology describes the "type" of game and technical terminology describes the set of technologies that make up a game such as AI or 3D engine. Take a look at any games magazine and you will see most games described in these terms. Initiation into this language is essential for anyone who wants to be a developer or hard-core gamer. Many young players, keen and recent initiates into the world of gaming wield these terms as proof of their knowledge and to distinguish themselves from their ignorant, casual-gaming fellows. I should know, I was one of these initiates.

But language is a cage. This terminology, perpetuated by gamers and developers alike has the effect of shaping our perception of a game, and often determines how we design new ones. Many developers, it seems, are straining against this prison of words, sensing vague intimations of aspects of gaming outside the language of convention, but lack the concepts with which to catch these shadows and render them concrete in code.

To escape this prison, we need to look at the aspects of gaming that lie outside of it, from the ideas of children yet unversed in the language of gameplay, to the intriguing mental shadows that we, the initiated, push aside as we play. I attempted to uncover some of these aspects in my research, aspects that I'm sure many readers will recognise in their own gaming experiences.

The Primacy of the Imagination

During my conversations with gamers old and young, I found (with younger gamers in particular) that the primary factor in attracting many of them to a game was its premise; the experience alluded to by its characters, themes and imagery. Here a player chooses a game because it allows him to experience a particular fantasy, of being a racing driver, adventurer or soldier. This fact seems to be well known to the copy writers of game advertising and packaging, who in most cases, tend to emphasise the themes, characters and plotlines in a game rather than its constructional description, although many games for hard-core, initiated audiences will focus on describing the game in terms of its genre history, as displaying more polygons than Quake III or having better volumetric lighting for example. This emphasis on the internal history of the video game can be a disadvantage, I feel, as it shuts out the uninitiated and promotes the limiting ideal of a game as a mere collection of algorithmic special effects, which as I hope to prove, is not the case.

This concept of the primacy of an underlying fantasy is given more weight if we read old games magazines from the early to mid eighties and look at how games were described when today's constructional and genre-based terminology was still in formation. Apart from the quaint clumsiness of such early terms as the "platform-and-ladders" game, there seemed to be much more of an emphasis on the themes, tasks and characters, in some cases evoking scenes of such unparalleled adventure that a young reader would be hard pushed to discern a game's genre were it not for the accompanying screenshots, and would probably be greatly disappointed when he actually got to play the game. This shows that the development of constructional and genre terminology has been valuable, not least in giving players a shorthand way of knowing what to expect from a game. But it also demonstrates that a gamer lacking the concepts with which to enclose his experience will respond to a game with a much greater portion of his imagination.

The underlying fantasies that a player has about a game may be of a general theme, such as the desire to win a race, be a soldier or rescue a princess, or they may be more complex and specific. Gamers may desire to experience a particular interplay between certain types of character, such as between a man and his evil relative, as with Zidane and Kuja in Final Fantasy IX. They may want to explore the interplay

between two opposing concepts, such as the fight between democracy and tyranny in a strategy game, or the balance of good and evil in Black and White. Or commonly, to experience a particular character in a particular situation, such as the popular theme of the lone warrior in a post-apocalyptic world. Some gamers will often think primarily in terms of theme, choosing games that reflect a particular imaginative concern irrespective of genre.

Younger gamers often see game characters and situations as imaginatively real, and see far more in a game object than the older, jaded eye. For example, one of the older Zelda games has an enemy which splits itself up into blocks, which fly around the screen and reform. The experienced player knows that it is a collection of blocky sprites, and in playing will regard the situation as a matter of timing his attacks, avoiding the blocks and finding a safe position. In other words he will see the situation as a system, paying only a little attention to the enemy as a character. But one young gamer described this enemy to me, in excited terms as a sand monster who turned himself into a sandstorm to attack the player. It seemed that he focused more on the monster as a character, seeing it as a being to be contended with rather than as a system to be negotiated.

In older, more knowledgeable gamers too we can see the primacy of an underlying fantasy. More than one gamer has admitted to me that he plays Civilization because he likes the idea of ruling a nation, waging war and taking over the world. One gamer of my acquaintance told me how he enjoys playing Civilization in a certain way, to create a situation where there are two main world powers in the game, himself and an opponent, both with advanced levels of technology. He would then plan a massive campaign against his enemy, creating an all-or-nothing war to end all wars. So in many games, a fantasy might "kick in" when their playing pieces become arranged in a certain way, creating a situation or process of interest to the gamer.

With developers we could say that one of the reasons why they often rehash the same old game ideas is not because they can't think of anything better, but because they want to create an ever more perfect representation of a particular fantasy or experience. The imaginative realm has often been a prime force in games design. The renowned designer of the Mario and Zelda games, Shigeru Miyamoto, has admitted that he draws inspiration from childhood memories of exploring the caves and forests of the countryside around his home (Poole, 2000).

Games are deeply linked with other forms of imaginative play with game characters and themes influencing play away from the computer. In older gamers we can see this in the number of websites devoted to popular game characters such as Sephiroth from Final Fantasy VII and the popularity of game related action figures, animated movies, comics and models. There is also the interesting fact that some players enjoy dressing up as their favourite video game character. According to writer Steven Poole, the Tokyo Game Show has a best costume contest for visitors who turn up in game related garb (Poole, 2000). Evidence enough to convince us that games can evoke a strong emotional and imaginative response and be a great influence on the inner life of a player.

Another related quality (and this is a purely personal reflection) is what I call "emotional resonance", the indefinable emotional impact that can be felt upon seeing a certain image, character or person; that unusual feeling of an image being "more real than real". This aspect of experience has fascinated me from an early age, especially the way that no matter how much you analyse the image in question, no matter how much you research its background or its semiotic relations, you get no closer to pinning down the meaning of its resonance. Many video game images have this quality, along with those in movies and other forms of art, as well as the natural world.

Not all gamers report these kinds of experiences. Some stick unreservedly to a constructional view of games, some ignore character and storyline and concentrate instead on the kinetic experience of playing or the cognitive manipulation of game objects and puzzles. Most gamers, it seems, sway between two different modes of playing, The first is an extroverted mode, where the players emphasis is focused more on the kinetic experience of playing and winning than on storyline or character, and on social gaming where the emphasis is more on the group doing the playing than the game itself. The second is the introverted mode of playing, where the game acts as a catalyst or facilitator for the gamers own feelings or imagination. Here the player imagines himself into the game. It is important to point out that these are

just rough working categories, and describe modes of playing, not types of player. An individual might move from one mode to another depending on the game and situation.

Another reason why some people might not report or acknowledge these experiences is because of our society. We live in a society which is profoundly extroverted, where inner experiences are often regarded as pathological aberrations, or waved away as being "only psychological". In schools, introversion is regarded as a problem to be fixed rather than a natural tendency; no teacher has ever suggested that a boisterous, extroverted child should spend more time in quiet reflection, except perhaps as a punishment.

The games world itself is not immune to such closed mindedness. I remember in the early nineties, reading a magazine review of that groundbreaking RPG , Eye of the Beholder. The reviewer spent the entire first page of his review denouncing role-playing fans, who in his eyes were a bunch of asocial misfits. He then went on to declare the game an all-time classic.

This kind of prejudice, as well as reflecting a simple lack of empathic understanding, has its roots in a wider social trend. It is fashionable in our culture to cultivate emotional distance and cynical detachment, to not let slip that we are moved, certainly not by an ephemeral, commercial medium such as the video game. Another factor is our attitude towards fantasy itself. The epic and magical worlds adored by western gamefreaks and eastern otaku are often derided as vessels of mere escapism. It is no wonder that these experiences remain in the shadows of both the mainstream games industry and of society as a whole.

Conclusion

Whatever the prejudices of our society, it is clear from this evidence that underneath the surface there is a complex, imaginative relationship between a player and a game, a relationship that underlies the literal and technical aspects of a game and merges with the players world and inner life. That these experiences inform the work of many developers is not disputed, but the fact remains that they do not yet form a part of mainstream discussion, nor have they been integrated into the common language of games design; an integration that may transform the entire field.

So how do we integrate these experiences? Without a full psychological investigation we can only speculate on the nature of these experiences and how they relate to games, and given the status of video games in the mainstream eye, such an investigation is unlikely. But we can go some way in understanding these experiences by relating them to ideas already existing in psychology. In part two of Games and the Imagination, Approaching the Imagination, I will explore some of these ideas and their relation to games design.

Bibliography

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Games and the Imagination

Part two: Approaching the Imagination

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Introduction

In part one of Games and the Imagination I discussed some of the aspects of gaming that remain unaccounted for by the conventional language of games design. I explored the idea that for many gamers an underlying fantasy is the primary factor in attracting them to a game, and that there is a complex imaginative relationship between a player and a game. Understanding this relationship and why and how games evoke such fantasies and experiences could revolutionise the way we think about games and how we design them. To do this, we need a framework that we can use to interpret these experiences and relate them to games design. Psychology seems like an obvious framework and it was the first to which I turned, but as I discovered there were fundamental problems in using psychology to interpret the kinds of experiences described in part one.

When I began to study this area I had initially hoped to find straightforward psychological theories that I could apply to my thinking in video games. Instead I found an unbridgeable chasm dividing one ideology from another, a division running deep within psychology with imagination and subjective experience at its heart. On one side of this divide lie the schools of cognitive, behaviourist and biological psychology, their theories and research being limited to the aspects of the mind that can be verified objectively using scientific methods. On the other side lie the psychodynamic and humanist psychologies, concerned mainly with personal subjective experience and basing their work on the philosophy of phenomenology, which states that in any investigation we must start with our subjective experience, it being the only viewpoint open to us with any certainty.

The problem is, that while the objective (or "third person") viewpoint has been extremely successful in providing models of behaviour and in describing explicit concepts such as learning and memory, it has had less success in the first-person, phenomenological realms of experience, consciousness and identity. As such, its proponents either limit their work to the non-subjective or take the extreme view that consciousness and subjective experience are secondary phenomena or completely illusory and do not represent an accurate context from which to view reality.

The phenomenological, first person viewpoint has a similar problem. Although it has been successful as a framework for a large number of psychotherapies and as an essential component in literary and cultural analysis, it has had difficulty finding an objective, scientific base in the theories offered by the third person perspective.

As psychologist William Glassman puts it (after D.N Robinson) "..it seems we are forced to choose between a psychology which is not scientific, and a science which is not psychology!" (Glassman, 2000). In approaching the imagination we are forced to choose the former, at least until we have a theory that successfully unites the first and third person approaches, since the experiences described in part one and indeed the whole idea of game playing lie within the context of first person experience[1].

Having decided on which side of the border we are on, we now have the second problem of finding a set of concepts to interpret these experiences. The first person realm is a vast sea of interconnecting and conflicting approaches, from depth psychology to cultural studies and post-structuralism. All of these perspectives are equally valid and no single viewpoint can encompass the entirety of first person experience (Of course, if you accept the postmodern critique of science, then the third person view is in no better position). This means that anything we say about first person experience will be an *interpretation*, not an explanation, one viewpoint amongst many others.

One of the most interesting and useful viewpoints that we can use to explore video games and the experiences they evoke is that of Jungian depth psychology. Although it is controversial in academic circles[2], Jungian psychology has been a great influence on the humanities and on many artists, writers and film-makers. Its concepts seem to fit video games like a glove, offering us a set of ideas that we can use to explore the complex relationship between a player and a game, and indeed between a designer and a game. It could also radically change the way we look at genre, violence and the process of playing amongst other things. Jungian psychology is a complex and multifaceted subject and I can only give the barest introduction to it in such a short article. This brief introduction is only intended to show how it relates to games design, and to give the reader the knowledge necessary for understanding the design concepts that can be derived from it. Readers wanting a deeper understanding of Jungian psychology are directed to the books listed in the bibliography. Lets start off by exploring the psychology of play and fantasy, subjects that underlie every aspect of game playing.

Fantasy, Play and Projection

Play has long been recognised as a fundamental part of human, even animal nature. Psychologists and educationalists see play as being a natural form of learning. Through play, nature trains the biological and psychological functions necessary for life, from hunting and physical survival, to social co-operation and cultural participation. On a cognitive level, play encourages the development of our concepts about the world. By toying with objects and ideas through playful experimentation we develop an understanding of the physical world and our place within it.

But there is more to play than just encouraging adaptation to our surroundings or the development of rational skills. The great theorist of play Johann Huizinger believed that it was the basis of all forms of ritual and represented the foundational impulse behind many forms of art and drama. He also maintained that far from being a wasteful exercise or the antithesis of work, play was essential to the well-being of society (Poole, 2000; Rheingold, 1991).

Although the educational and social aspects of play are widely known and accepted, introverted play, fantasy and pure make-believe are less well regarded. This may be due to the extroverted bias of our culture or to Freud's popular notion that fantasy represents a regressive means of escaping from reality. But according to Jungian psychology, fantasy is just as important as any other kind of thinking and in fact, is essential to healthy psychological growth. Just as extroverted play orientates the individual to the outside world and helps him comprehend it, introverted play or fantasy, according to Jung, orientates the individual to his inner world. In the stories, figures and landscapes of fantasy, an individual plays with different elements of his own personality rendered in symbolic form (Stevens, 1999).

This is not to say that extroverted and introverted play are mutually exclusive. I'm sure many readers will remember playing with toys or other objects and investing them with a meaning quite unrelated to their actual function. By projecting his imagination (often unconsciously) onto an object, an individual gives it a new and personal meaning. This allows him to concretise his inner fantasy play by representing it with symbolic objects. Thus a stick becomes a gun, a teddy bear becomes a comforting friend and a collection of blocky sprites becomes a menacing foe. Projection is used in this way by play therapists, who know that a child, who may not be able to verbalise or consciously understand her feelings, will often enact personal issues through toys, with inner processes, conflicts and goals mirrored symbolically in the stories and themes of play.

The Game as Imagination Space

I think that the concept of projection goes some way in describing how a person becomes immersed in a video game. Through identifying consciously or subconsciously with the different characters, narratives and processes in a game, the player is able to explore personal issues, goals and ideals, as well as participate in those transmitted to her by her culture. This doesn't just mean that a player will identify solely with a game's controllable characters, it means that the game as a *whole* will act as a

kind of "imagination space" with enemies, themes, landscapes, items and processes all reflecting a particular imaginative concern. The interplay of two opposing characters or political groups for example, may symbolise an inner conflict. A satisfying union, such as the moment in an RPG when a particularly enigmatic or dangerous character joins the player's party may symbolise the resolution of an inner conflict represented by the characters differing natures. Of course seeing everything in a game as a projection of the imagination is a best case scenario. Since most games have fixed processes and plotlines, they won't all relate to the concerns of every player. But as games increase in complexity and freedom, they will be able to accommodate many different playing styles and personal goals, mirroring the inner dynamics of the players personality. This idea of a game as an imagination space may sound unusual but it has an interesting historical parallel in the form of ancient Greek theatre.

When a citizen of ancient Greece went to the theatre, he didn't go to be mildly amused or to view the kind of lightweight nonsense that passes for entertainment today. He went there to experience *catharsis,* a release of deep feeling that to the Greeks was related to the purification of the senses and the soul. The key to catharsis was *mimesis,* a combination of the suspension of disbelief, the ability to empathise with the characters on-stage and the ability to internalise the drama as it was performed, In other words, to relate to the drama on a personal, imaginative level (Rheingold, 1991). To the Greeks, catharsis was a healthy way of dealing with the great themes of life and death, and it's not for nothing that the term is retained by psychology today, to describe the release of emotion related to the resolution of an internal difficulty. Such catharsis may also occur within our digital imagination space, when an event occurs of particular resonance to the gamer, such as the union of two formerly opposing characters or the surmounting of a difficult obstacle, though often at differing levels of intensity.

Another parallel is found in the work of the great German novelist and Nobel laureate Hermann Hesse. In his novel Steppenwolf, Hesse explores the possibility of literature representing "..the ego as a manifold entity." He also advises the reader, "not to regard the characters of such a creation as separate beings, but as the various facets and aspects of a higher unity" (Hesse, 1927).

But what are the various facets and aspects of the psyche that we project onto a game? Can we say anything general about them that we could use in game design or are they utterly unique in every person? And how do the inner concerns of an individual relate to and identify with the epic and often otherworldly themes found in games and fantasy? To answer these questions we need to turn to Jung's metapsychology, that is, his map of the imagination.

The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

Many readers will be familiar with the notion of the unconscious or subconscious mind, that aspect of the psyche that contains all that consciousness is unaware of. This includes such things as memories, forgotten experiences, subliminal perceptions and habitual tendencies such as the ability to drive a car without thinking about it. Most popular formulations of the unconscious regard it as a *tabula rasa*, or a blank slate upon which a person's experiences are written as he or she goes through life. This view leads many to the conclusion that all minds are utterly different, or that the personality is entirely constructed by society and circumstance. As well as failing to take biology into account, with the fact that all brains share the same basic mechanisms, this idea failed to impress Carl Jung, who for nine years had conducted a study of the delusions and hallucinations experienced by sufferers of schizophrenia.

Jung noticed, when studying the dreams, fantasies and delusions of his patients, that many of them contained images and ideas that could not be related to a patient's life history. They could, of course, be explained away as meaningless mental irregularities, but he also noticed that these images and ideas were very similar to ones found in mythical and religious symbolism from all over the world. As psychiatrist Anthony Stevens explains, "Jung gathered a wealth of evidence which persuaded him that this universal symbolism was due less to individual experience or cultural dissemination than to the structure of the human brain and to a fundamental component of the unconscious psyche which was shared by all humankind" (Stevens, 1999). Jung called this fundamental component the *collective unconscious*.

Within the collective unconscious, Jung posited the existence of *archetypes*. These are fundamental psychological patterns that relate to the universal symbols described above. As Jung

explains,"The concept of the archetype.. is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain motifs which crop up everywhere. We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, deliria and delusions of individuals living today..These typical images and associations are what I call archetypal ideas" (Storr, 1998). Although Jung's archetypal hypothesis is controversial[2], some thinkers believe that it might represent a first-person view of such third-person concepts as the cognitive schemata of cognitive science and the evolved psychological mechanisms of evolutionary psychology; although it is not yet clear how much of an archetypal pattern is inherited and how much is culturally transmitted (Glassman, 2000; Stevens,1998).

Typical archetypal ideas that often appear in myths, dreams and fantasies include, the hero, the devouring monster, the wise old man or woman, the father, the mother, the "dream woman" the "dream man", helpful animals and the dangerous enemy. There are also archetypal processes such as the heroic quest, the descent into the underworld, the slaying of a dragon, sexual union, the rising and setting of the sun, birth and death. These archetypal ideas symbolise the universal components and processes of the psyche and can often evoke a strong emotional impact.

This is not to say that an archetype *is* a mythical image or being. Mythical images, along with those found in dreams and fantasies are representations, or symbols of the archetypes. Archetypes themselves are innate psychological patterns with no content of their own, that take on the appearance of real life images that relate to them in some way. For example, one person may have heroic fantasies of being a cyberpunk hacker, bringing down the systems of evil corporations and another may have fantasies of scoring the winning goal in the World Cup. Although the content of these fantasies are different, and the personalities of the wannabe hacker and the football fan may be utterly divergent, the basic form of their fantasies and the emotions associated with them are the same. Both examples depict the heroic triumph of a special individual, a universal theme of great antiquity, and both have similar related emotions; the feelings of mastery, personal strength, self-confidence and victory. In both individuals the hero archetype is at work, but it is expressed in different ways depending on their respective personalities and backgrounds. These are simplistic examples, just to illustrate the nature of the archetypes as "virtual" patterns that take on the image of things that are related to them in a person's life. Much more could be discovered by exploring feelings and attitudes relating to different parts of a fantasy, sometimes revealing things that may be other than heroic.

As well as appearing as the imaginary beings and landscapes of dreams and fantasies, archetypes can be activated by images and people in the outside world. Two powerful examples are the "dream man" or "dream woman", the anima and animus. Have you ever seen a person of the opposite sex, either in real life or an image, and being struck with an overwhelming emotion beyond mere instinct; a feeling that he or she is "the one?" This person has a magical, eternal quality, and when contemplating her face, your soul aches with an almost spiritual longing. He may appear to you as everything you have ever needed; when you are near him you are lost in rapture, when you are apart, you fall into a pit of darkest despair.

If , as a man, you have seen this woman, then you have met what Jungian psychology calls your anima, or soul-image. According to Jung, every man carries within his psyche the image of a woman, the anima. She appears to him in dreams, often as a guide, often as a magical being of almost painful beauty, sometimes as a dangerous seductress. Often she is projected, quite unconsciously, onto a real woman, investing this woman with her magical qualities, commonly obscuring the real woman underneath. Sometimes such projections can lead to lasting love, sometimes, when the real woman breaks through the projection and the man realises that she is not who he thought she was, he may accuse her of having "changed", leave her, and go off in search of his anima princess, another woman who by chance embodies his inner love.

The animus is Jung's term for the corresponding male image within a woman's psyche. In dreams and fantasies he may be seen as a hero, sometimes as a rogue. Another symbol of the animus is as a brutal, animal-like male, as found in the fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast. Again, women often see their animus in real men, sometimes leading to a stable relationship when the real man underneath is understood, and sometimes causing great difficulties when the animus projection blinds her to reality. These examples show the power of projection, and also the power of the archetypes. They are not to be regarded as mere abstract concepts or ideas, they are the fundamental forces of the psyche.

Here's another example, of great relevance to video games. Imagine a timid young boy, fearful of risk and somewhat overdependant on his parents. One day he sees a cartoon depicting heroic adventures. The boy feels a great emotional resonance when watching the show, watches it every week and starts playing imaginary games based upon it, seeing himself as his television hero or sharing the same adventures. He might imaginatively summon his favourite characters to himself when he encounters difficult situations or before sleep, when he is alone in the darkness of night. Gradually, and with parental support and understanding the boy becomes more confident and independent.

This TV show has activated the boy's hero archetype. This archetype often comes to the fore in dreams and fantasies whenever courage and strong self-identity are needed. The heroic games of children are expressions of this archetypal pattern that will arise quite naturally as part of their development, through conquering the dragons of dependence and fear, a child becomes less emotionally reliant on his parents and begins to build a stronger sense of identity. In this example, although the child may have had vague feelings of unease surrounding his initial situation, and may have had dreams containing heroic imagery, the TV show gave him concrete images that he could relate to and emulate. Through their similarity to the inner archetype, the images of the TV show become emotionally resonant symbols of it and make the unconscious qualities of self identity and courage known to the conscious mind. Through fantasy and play the child will eventually integrate the aspects of the hero archetype represented by the TV show into his conscious personality. The hero and the heroic quest are found almost universally in video games, and contrary to popular belief, are not limited to childhood concerns. I will explore these archetypes and their relevance to video games in more detail later.

The four most important archetypes, essential to any understanding of Jungian psychology are the shadow, anima, animus and self. These primary archetypes generally appear in most dreams and fantasies and in many video games, under various symbolic guises. In many individuals, the shadow is the first one to appear in dream and fantasy life and is a constant factor in the development of personality (Jung, 1964).

The Shadow

The shadow often (but not always) appears in dreams and fantasies as a threatening enemy representing the aspects of the unconscious mind that are unknown or repressed because of the attitude of the conscious mind towards them. In other words, the shadow is our "dark side" and will taint other archetypes depending on our relationship with them. A simplistic example is the straight laced business man who dreams of threatening anarchists or bohemians storming into his office and causing a scene. A Jungian interpretation of this dream would be that the bohemians symbolise an unconscious creative talent, or attitude towards life that could be useful to the dreamer but remains outside the conscious personality because of his attitude towards it. This doesn't mean that the dreamer should drop everything and become a bohemian, it means that he should try and integrate a little more creativity and spontaneity (or whatever he associates with bohemians) into his life, qualities that for whatever reason his conscious personality finds threatening.

The shadow is often projected onto others. Perhaps our business man may be moved to rage whenever he encounters free-spirited creative individuals and will associate them with all kinds of evils. If he understands his dream and acts upon it, he may later dream of less threatening or even friendly bohemians, and will probably develop a more tolerant understanding of their real life counterparts.

A person who sees himself as a free-spirited bohemian however, may dream or fantasise about having conflicts with threatening straight laced business men, reflecting qualities that he consciously finds unpleasant, but may be useful to him, such as the ability to organise and think rationally. Working with the shadow is a real moral responsibility as it forces us to confront what we do not accept in ourselves and often project onto others, sustaining such problems as racism and homophobia. To deal with the shadow is to deal with the ancient problem of good and evil on a personal level.

Jung's shadow is pretty much the same as the notion of the Other, which is found in cultural studies and describes the way one culture represents those different from it. As Ziauddin Sardar describes it, "The most common representation of the Other is as the darker side, the binary opposite of oneself: we are civilised, they are barbaric; the colonialists are hard-working, the natives are lazy.." (Sardar and Van Loon, 1999).

Although the shadow often appears threatening, it may also represent qualities that the dreamer finds positive, but does not attribute to himself. A person might dream of a friend or compelling stranger of the same sex who displays qualities that the dreamer finds admirable, but is afraid of integrating into conscious life.

People might try to integrate the entire shadow or fight it off at every turn, but this is impossible. The basic facts of individual existence, that a person is one thing and not another, that a person says yes to some things and no to others, implies the basic opposition of ego and shadow, me and you, good and evil. The task of the individual is to develop an understanding of their shadow and what it tells them about themselves, to integrate what they can and negotiate with what they cannot.

The shadow appears almost universally in video games, as every enemy and every threatening character or idea. A gamer might choose games that depict the destruction of a certain order of enemy, reflecting his own relationship with his shadow. A designer may also create enemies and processes that reflect his own inner concerns. I`ll return to this important subject when I discuss using archetypal images in games.

The Anima and Animus

As we saw earlier, the anima and animus are the contrasexual archetypes within men and women respectively. Just as there is a biological imperative behind sexual attraction, Jung maintained that there was also a related psychological imperative. Jung said of man and the anima, "..the whole nature of man presupposes woman, both physically and spiritually. His system is tuned to woman from the start" (Stevens, 1999). And woman is tuned to man in much the same way[3]. But the roles of the anima and animus go beyond blind sexual instinct as it is popularly perceived. The meaning of man to woman, and of woman to man relate closely to every aspect of the psyche and to every stage of its development.

According to Jungian psychology, the anima and animus, when they appear in dreams and fantasies are personifications of the relationship of an individual with his or her unconscious. In other words, a man will experience his unconscious as feminine, and a woman will experience hers as masculine. The anima often appears as a witch or as a magical woman with knowledge of deep and unfathomable realms, i.e. the unconscious mind, or as a guide such as Beatrice in Dante's Paradiso (Jung, 1964). The anima also appears as a lover or companion, reflecting in dreams a successful relationship with the unconscious. She may sometimes appear as a princess to be rescued, as in many fairy tales and games. Guarded by a beast symbolising some attitude of the psyche that prevents a good relationship with the anima or with women, she must be saved by a hero strong enough to stand up to such a creature and not be devoured.

The anima also has a negative or shadow aspect. She may appear as a *femme fatale*, like the mythical sirens luring men to their doom with their magical songs, or as a dangerous witch, symbolising both a negative attitude towards the anima and the unconscious, and the danger of encountering the unconscious without strength and discrimination. The anima is also tied up with all the qualities and attitudes that a man regards as feminine and by working with the anima, he can integrate and understand such valuable qualities.

The animus, the male image within a woman, often appears as an attractive heroic figure, sometimes as a wise spiritual guide. Just as the anima relates to feminine qualities in a man, the animus relates to perceived masculine qualities within a woman, such as heroic courage and rationality. By working with the animus, a woman can integrate these positive qualities into her personality. The animus also has a negative aspect and can appear as a rogue or criminal. Sometimes he appears as a beast, reflecting a wild, untamed and unintegrated animus, or a negative attitude towards masculinity and her relation to it. A woman dreaming of such a beast may be fearful at first, but as she works with the animus, he will be transformed into more attractive human forms. The story of Beauty and the Beast is a reflection of this process (Jung, 1964).

As I described earlier, the anima and animus can be projected on to real men and women, sometimes causing all kinds of dangerous obsessions and misunderstandings. By subconsciously tying up their anima or animus with a person of the opposite sex, an individual effectively identifies them with his own unconscious and requires their presence and their compliance to engage with it. This is not to say that anima and animus projection is entirely negative, it can be a tool of personal growth when recognised, and when the real man or woman behind the projection is accepted and understood.

The anima often appears in games as a woman to be rescued by the player, sometimes as a companion. There are few games depicting the relationship between a woman and her animus. But some games, such as the Final Fantasy series do a good job by giving the player a large number of male and female characters to control. To a male player a female character can symbolise his anima, such as Rinoa from FFVIII; Squall could symbolise the animus of a female player. Squaresoft make this work by depicting their relationship from both perspectives. Gamers might choose games with themes that reflect their own relationship with their anima or animus, and designers might create characters and stories that reflect theirs.

The Self

Jung referred to the self as the "archetype of archetypes" (Stevens, 1999). It represents the totality of the psyche, both consciousness and unconsciousness and all that they contain. To Jungian psychology, the self is the innermost nucleus of the psyche. It is often symbolised in dreams, fantasies and mythology as a circle, mandala or square; as a quaternity, such as the "four corners of the universe" the four directions or a circle divided into four. It may appear personified as a wise old man to a male dreamer, or as a wise old woman to a female, or perhaps as a great king or queen. Sometimes it appears as a divine or magical child. Generally in myths, the self is symbolised by the "cosmic man" or woman, representing the totality of the individual. In games it is sometimes represented by the most powerful principle in the game's world. In RPG's it may be symbolised by the four elements, a magical jewel in the centre of the world or the tree of life. In other games it may be represented by such things as the space-time continuum, the fundamental genetic code, a nation state or by anything that symbolises the greatest power in a game.

The self is also symbolised by the helpful animals that often turn up in fairy tales to advise and assist the hero. Many of these animals appear in games, such as Link's owl companion in Zelda 64, or the moogles in the Final Fantasy games. These creatures, unpredictable, often indestructible, but somehow vulnerable, possess a natural wisdom that defies any enemy and lifts them from the mundane world. They are often represented as servants of a great power, depicting the early appearance of the self as it guides the struggling hero towards his destiny.

The self is also an archetype of healing and unity, and will often arise in the dreams and fantasies of people struggling with inner conflicts. The drawings of children who are in the midst of divorce or family difficulties often contain circular motifs, symbolising the attempt of the self to bring some unity and healing to a child's fragmenting inner world (Stevens, 1999). This healing and unifying aspect of the self can turn up in games, with the almost universal representation of force fields and energy shields as circular or spherical zones of light.

But the self also has a shadow side; as the most powerful force in the Jungian psyche, the shadow of the self is often symbolised by an ultimate evil. Taken together these two aspects reflects the great polarities of consciousness and unconsciousness, light and darkness.

These four archetypes are the main forces within the unconscious and are often projected on to objects in the outside world, including games. As one can see from the examples given, many games already contain symbols of these archetypes, either through social convention and repetition or through the imagination of the designer, who might spontaneously produce such symbols in a fantasy. But developers cannot simply put an archetypal image in a game and claim that they are being "Jungian". We need to understand how the archetypes relate to the individual and to his psychological development, and why he has one fantasy rather than another.

The Archetypes and the Individual

The archetypes and the collective unconscious are in Jungian terms, the lowest level of the unconscious psyche, their patterns shaping the layers above. But as we have seen, the archetypes appear in dreams and fantasies as images from personal life. We have also seen that archetypes appear as positive or negative images depending on our relationship to them. In other words, they are coloured by the experiences we have in life and by our conscious attitude towards them. In Jung's model of the psyche, our relationship with the archetypes that determine how they appear to us is shaped by the *personal* and *cultural* unconscious.

Above the collective unconscious lies the personal and cultural unconscious. The cultural unconscious contains all the unconscious assumptions given to an individual by the society he or she grows up in. Some writers do not refer to a cultural unconscious, as strictly speaking, all these experiences are mixed up with personal ones, but I will separate them as it allows an entry point for cultural studies, which as I will show, is an essential subject when using archetypal images in games. The personal unconscious is similar to the traditional view of the unconscious mind described at the start of this section. It contains all our memories, forgotten experiences, subliminal perceptions and habitual tendencies. It also contains our *complexes*.

The basic units of the personal unconscious that shape our relationship with the archetypes are the complexes. I'm sure many are familiar with the term complex, as it has entered popular use as a term describing all manner of psychological problems, but few are aware of what a complex actually is or how it arises. When an archetype is activated it gathers to itself ideas images and experiences associated with the situation or person that activated it. This bundle of experiences, emotions and ideas surrounding an archetype is a complex. A good example, given by psychiatrist Anthony Stevens, is the activation of the mother archetype in a child. According to Jungian psychology, every child is born with an innate expectancy of a mother figure, the archetype of the mother. This archetype becomes active when the child experiences a woman whose behaviour is similar to the child's innate expectation of a mother. Sometimes this woman may be the birth mother, sometimes it may be a foster parent, aunt or older sister. The emotions and experiences associated with this mother figure form a complex, surrounding the archetype's emotional core (Stevens, 1999).

The forming of complexes is completely normal, but they often cause suffering. An example of this is given by Anthony Stevens. Stevens described a woman whose childhood had been dominated by a brutal, tyrannical father. This woman's father archetype was activated only partially and only the law-giving, authoritarian aspects of the father archetype were built into her father complex, with the loving and protecting aspects of the paternal archetype remaining unconscious. Stevens continued to describe how this woman kept being drawn to bullying men, but at the same time she had an unfulfilled longing for a man who would give her love and protection. According to Stevens, this woman's dreams fantasies and behaviour showed that she longed for someone to activate and fulfil the unconscious aspects of her father archetype (Stevens, 1999). As well as demonstrating the harm done by bad parenting, this example also shows that archetypes are *complete*, that they contain every aspect of fatherhood, motherhood, herohood and selfhood, and that once activated, they seek completion and conscious realisation. The archetypes in their total form are often symbolised in world mythology as figures such as Mother Earth or Gaia; as ultimate father figures such as Zeus, and as ultimate heroes such as Odysseus.

Our relation to the archetypes and the content of our complexes is also shaped by the culture we grow up in and the unconscious assumptions that we pick up as a member of society. An example is a society that promotes and encourages the view that a hero never shows his feelings. These emotions and images bound up with a particular society's view of what makes a hero represent a kind of *cultural complex*, since it is held by a large number of people, and will be transmitted to members of that society whose own complexes are formed by such images. These cultural complexes, held by large numbers of people, are often projected on to others and often affect the way a society functions. They can be harmful as sociologists and cultural critics have shown. But such complexes cannot be argued with, reasoned with or overthrown by revolution; like personal complexes, which in fact they are, they require healing and transformation.

The gradual process of working through complexes and integrating unconscious contents into the conscious personality form Jung's theory of psychological development, the individuation process. Unlike some theories of development that focus on social adaptation alone, the process of individuation describes a life long and personal process of increasing self awareness, maturity and self realisation. Individuation is a natural process of the psyche, occurring the background of one's life, but it can be arrested by traumatic experiences, harmful complexes or a faulty attitude towards the unconscious. Individuation begins with the awakening of self consciousness and self identity in a child, and continues through the whole of life with the gradual integration and conscious understanding of the unconscious material that appears to an individual in their dreams fantasies and projections. The culmination of individuation is a successful relationship with the self, the archetype of wholeness that represents the totality of the individual psyche.

Conclusion

Complexes, such as a woman's struggle against a tyrannical father figure and her search for his loving counterpart form the characters, themes and set-pieces of the inner dramas that are enacted in dreams and fantasies and projected on to the outside world. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the emotional resonance that a player associates with certain video game characters and themes derives from a projection of the players current psychological situation.

The fact that games are interactive allows a player to go beyond the passive projection or mimesis of theatre and literature, and to consciously take part in their fantasy. Thus the woman described earlier might be particularly drawn to a game that depicted a tyrant as an enemy and the rescue or discovery of a loving male figure as a goal. Whether such a game could help her therapeutically is debatable, but by seeing her inner concern and the path to its resolution within a game, and by being forced by its interactivity to make decisions regarding her inner situation, the woman is given a concrete set of ideas and images that might help her in some way. At the very least, this game and its challenges will be very relevant and involving to this particular woman.

By seeing images that reflect unconscious archetypal potential, a gamer may in some cases be assisted in his personal development. The emotional resonance experienced when unconscious archetypal potential is projected onto an image may account for the popularity of certain game characters and themes, and give a reason why some gamers like dressing up as their favourite character, or spend time drawing them or writing fan fiction. A gamers favourite character is a symbol or a reflection of unactivated archetypal potential. By playing the game, drawing pictures etc. the gamer is trying to integrate the aspects of the archetype represented by the character into his or her conscious personality.

The process of resolving inner conflicts and integrating unconscious material may sound like very unusual subjects for a game, but this process is reflected in many games already, because it is symbolised in myths and fairy tales as the heroic quest. In part three of Games and the Imagination, The Game as Quest, I will explore the heroic quest and show how it operates as a symbol of the development of consciousness and identity. I will also show that far from being the preserve of RPG or adventure games, the heroic quest and the individuation process appear in the majority of genres, in a large number of games.

Notes

1: Selecting a first person viewpoint from which to interpret the imaginative relationship between a player and a game is fraught with difficulties. As we have seen there is a schism between the third person, objective viewpoint, and the first person, subjective viewpoint. Within the first person viewpoint there is a further schism; between a perspective that regards the psyche as a social or linguistic construct (the *tabula rasa* view described earlier) and the Jungian viewpoint that states that the psyche is based on fundamental inherited psychological structures. Most schools of aesthetic or cultural criticism focus on the former, because it has a strong base in linguistics and semiotics which are ideal tools for understanding structures of cultural meaning. This viewpoint has already been successfully applied to video games (Poole, 2000) and I regard it as highly important. But I maintain that any attempt to understand video games must include personal psychology and address the issue of personal meaning, and that any personal psychology that claims that the psyche is a tabula rasa is incomplete, as overwhelming third person research will attest. The relationship between a player and a game is a complex one, and any "playability theory" must encompass cognitive, personal (in the sense of something having a unique resonance and meaning to an individual) and cultural domains.

What is needed is a dual integration; firstly between a first person psychology that admits the existence of universal (i.e. inherited) psychological structures, and a first person psychology that admits the intersubjective, cultural and contextual nature of the material based on those structures; and secondly, an integration of the third person objective viewpoint and the first person subjective viewpoint. The first integration is a conceptual matter, the second is known by consciousness researchers as the "Hard Problem." Until such an integration takes place, anything said about the psychology of video games, and indeed the psychology of anything, will be limited and provisional.

2: Jungian psychology is controversial in academic psychology because it is a first person theory, and like all first person theories it cannot find a sound base in third person research. It is controversial in first person academic fields such as cultural studies, because it claims that the psyche is not a total social construction and because Jung's complex, heavyweight writings have often been misunderstood. As it occupies a middle ground between the first and third person realms, it is in a difficult philosophical position, but as I stated in the note above, the only way for psychology to go forwards is to embrace an integrative approach, and Jung's ideas may provide a stepping stone towards that.

3: The description of the anima and animus, as the female "image" within a male and the male "image" within a female is not to make any judgement regarding homosexuality, it is just the common description used by Jungian writers for ease of understanding. Since the archetypes are psychological and emotional patterns with no content of their own, they are not innate images of men or women, but the feelings and ideas associated with them. Therefore, the anima "feeling" of a homosexual man, that is, the feeling of a desirable, or perhaps dangerous "other" will be symbolised by a male image or projected onto a man.

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Games and the Imagination

Part Three: The Game as Quest

By Richard Dare

Introduction

In the previous part of Games and the Imagination I introduced the concept of the game as imagination space, a seamless whole where the different characters, objects and processes of a game act as symbolic representations of a players inner concerns. To understand the imagination space and its relationship to the player I introduced Jungian psychology and the concept of archetypes, low level psychological patterns that shape perception and understanding, patterns that not only appear as symbols in dreams, fantasies and myths, but also in many games, either through social convention or through the imagination of the designer. One of the most important archetypal processes is the heroic quest, which not only forms the structure of countless myths and fairy tales from across the globe, but also appears in the structures, processes and plots of many video games.

From Crowther and Wood's Advent, through Zelda and Final Fantasy, to Tomb Raider, Pokemon and beyond, the heroic quest has been at the core of video games. It appears both explicitly, as in most of the RPG genre, and in a lighter, thematic sense as in Command and Conquer, or in any game that depicts an individual or a group under a common banner, a challenge and a goal. Its continuing popularity amongst developers and gamers suggests that this theme goes beyond the mere cliché.

Why is it such a common theme? The writer Steven Poole suggests that the action based nature of the heroic quest lends itself to video games which are not yet equipped to handle the nuance of other themes (Poole, 2000). This may be true, but it only tells part of the story. As a choice of theme the heroic quest goes beyond the utilitarian. For example, there is the interesting observation that a great number of beginning game designers attempt an RPG, the most common representation of the quest, as their first effort, or at least express the desire to work towards creating one in the future. For many designers the perfectly realised heroic quest represents the summit of their efforts. It seems reasonable to suppose that there is a whole class of "questing" designers, as opposed to those who might see their work chiefly in terms of logical puzzles or literary and cinematic storytelling etc.

One of main reasons why the heroic quest is such a popular theme for both gamers and developers is that it is an *archetypal* theme, a universal human symbol. To Jungian psychology the heroic quest is a symbolic reflection of an important part of the inner journey of psychological growth and development. According to Jungian psychology, the motif of the hero arises in dreams and fantasies whenever strong self identity and consciousness are needed (Jung, 1964). The hero is the person who can encounter the forces of the unconscious mind with its dark labyrinths and devouring dragons without being lost or devoured, without being overwhelmed by the unconscious and losing his individual identity. This archetype is especially important in the psychological development of children and young people who are faced with the task of separating psychologically from their parents and developing a strong sense of identity. But it isn't exclusive to childhood alone; it can appear in dreams and fantasies whenever strength is needed to encounter the forces of unconsciousness and return safely with its treasures.

The Structure of the Heroic Quest

According to the scholar Joseph Campbell, who studied the heroic quest from a moderately Jungian perspective in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, the heroic quest is an amplification of the initiation rituals found in many cultures across the globe. These rituals generally have three stages,

departure, initiation and return. In the first stage, the person undergoing the initiation either leaves or is taken from his familiar surroundings. In the second stage, the person undergoes an initiation ritual which has the effect of significantly changing his view of the world. In the third stage, the individual who has been initiated returns home, but with a new role. Some cultures, for example initiate boys into manhood by taking them away from the childhood world of their families and subjecting them to painful or strenuous rituals that have the effect of breaking the psychological tie with the old world and preparing them for their new roles as men (Campbell, 1949).

From the Jungian perspective, this cycle of departure, initiation and return reflects the inner process of encountering the unconscious mind, integrating previously unknown psychological contents, and making them a part of the conscious personality. This process mirrors the initiation ritual in that it involves a departure from one's old sense of self (childhood for example, or a set of views that no longer serve a person), a sometimes strenuous encounter with the contents of the unconscious in the form of inner turmoil, dreams, fantasies and projections, resulting in their integration into the conscious personality, which "returns" as it were, transformed, with a new sense of self (Jung, 1964).

This process is symbolised by the heroic quest, which Campbell summarised as, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man"(Campbell, 1949). So, heroic tales act as imagination spaces, with the hero representing the ego of the individual (or in many cases, the strength of ego required by an individual undergoing such a journey), the different places he visits and the beings he encounters representing different aspects of his unconscious mind, and the narrative itself representing the ways in which the ego deals with these unconscious contents. The boon of the returning hero is a symbol of the inner treasure that has been wrested from unconsciousness and successfully integrated into the conscious personality.

Some myths and fairy tales symbolise a single cycle, that is, they deal with only a few "inner issues". Others are comprised of many such cycles, often nested within each other, dealing with different aspects of the psyche within a single epic journey, a journey that taken as a whole represents the entire process of individuation. These cycles are not necessarily in a linear order, in most stories and games they overlap and interrelate in complex ways. Lets look at each stage of the cycle in turn and explore a few of the many motifs associated with them. As with the Jungian psychology described in part two, it is not possible in this short article to detail every permutation of the heroic quest. Readers wanting a deeper understanding are referred to the books in the bibliography; particularly Jung's *Man and His Symbols,* Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* and Marie-Louise Von Franz's *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* and *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales.*

Departure

Here begins the journey. The opening scene of the heroic quest and the introduction of the hero often takes place in relatively mundane, safe and unthreatening surroundings, such as the hero's native town or family home. Sometimes, this place may be idyllic, sometimes, as in many modern stories such as The Matrix, the opening situation is less pleasant. It is an undifferentiated state, where the hero's identity has yet to emerge from the unconscious collectivity of the family home or society. Sometimes it symbolises a way of life gone stale, a state of being that no longer suits an individual. In Jungian terms, the opening scene of the quest is a symbol of an initial psychological situation. This could be a safe childhood home reflecting the world of a child before he separates psychologically from his parents, or a scene of a man dissatisfied with his life as it is, living below his potential in some anonymous metropolis. As an imagination space, the totality of the initial scene, its landscapes and characters, mirror a particular inner state.

But the normality and mundanity of this scene is interrupted. A messenger arrives, in the form of a strange person, an animal or a fateful event that gives the hero-to-be a glimpse of another world. This is the hero's call to adventure. Perhaps the benevolent king falls ill and needs the cure of a magical herb; perhaps the hero catches a glimpse of a beautiful woman or a compelling stranger; an enemy may arise,

threatening the home of the hero; or kidnapping him or his relatives or friends The mythical world has many ways of luring people to their destiny.

This strange messenger or event in its negative form is a symbol of the shadow; in its positive form it may symbolise the anima, animus, or perhaps an early appearance of the self. It has appeared to lure the hero away from his initial, unsatisfying situation, to show him aspects of himself or of his life that he must deal with if he is to grow.

For me, Zelda, Ocarina of Time is the game that is most successful in creating this initial situation. The village in which the adventure starts is a warm, enclosed childhood paradise, the enjoyment of which is enhanced by the ominous high walls and dark exit tunnels surrounding it, giving the player a foreknowing of the dangers to come; an awareness of both the safety of home, and the shadowy world outside. This contrast between safety and fear is precisely the experience of the call to adventure.

Sometimes the messenger is ignored, the call refused. The hero becomes trapped in his fear of change, his own misguided apprehensions. His world becomes a sterile wasteland. After glimpsing the world beyond, yet refusing it in favour of the safe, limiting village, he essentially refuses to grow. The hero becomes a victim to be saved. The story of sleeping beauty has this motif, with the young Briar Rose's refusal symbolised by her being put to sleep by a hag. This motif appears in Final Fantasy VII, when the hero Cloud falls into a paralysing despair, requiring the heroine Tifa to enter his dream world to rescue him.

The first encounter for those who have not refused the call is generally with a mentor, a kindly teacher or guide. Often depicted as a wise old man or woman, sometimes as an animal, who gives the hero advice or magical items needed on the journey. Examples include Obi-Wan Kenobi, Luke's mentor in Star Wars; Professor Oak in Pokemon, and in Zelda, Ocarina of Time, a wise owl who appears at appropriate times to give direction and advice, as well as Link's fairy companion, who gives constant guidance throughout the game. These characters are early symbols of the self, the totality of the psyche, giving the hero the assurance that the strange realms about to be entered can be survived and understood.

After leaving home and meeting with a mentor, the hero faces the challenge of the threshold guardian, a being who protects the gateway between the known and the unknown. Every region has its tales of the bogeymen, ogres and monsters that lurk outside the city gate, the trolls under the bridge, the wild punishment for those who dare to venture beyond conventional boundaries, both cultural and personal. This threshold represents the point of no return, the boundary between the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious. Sometimes the crossing of the threshold is symbolised by a hazardous journey or by the entrance to a cave or labyrinth.

Initiation

Having crossed the threshold, the hero enters a world of strange powers and difficult challenges, all reflecting the psychological concerns that lead the hero away from home. Some tales may tell of only one challenge but most contain several, repeating the cycle again and again within this realm, reflecting the different psychological contents that must be integrated and understood in order to face a greater final challenge.

Three common trials or events that take place in the realm of initiation are the confrontation with an enemy, a meeting with, or rescue of a beloved person, and the theft or retrieval of a magical or important object. The battle with an enemy may symbolise the struggle with a harmful or inappropriate attitude, such as a child's overdependance on his parents. In this case the symbolic enemy must be battled with and slain so that the individual can progress. Sometimes the encounter with an enemy may symbolise the struggle with the shadow, with unconscious contents that one does not accept but could be integrated into the conscious personality like the businessman example in part two. In this case, the enemy is confronted and battled, but is eventually redeemed.

Sometimes a beloved person is rescued. In many stories and games this person is a woman, symbolising the anima, the battle for her rescue symbolising the struggle to free her and her related qualities from the clutches of a negative attitude such as a harmful dependence on one's parents. The negative attitude can sometimes be symbolised by the beloved being in a frightening form as in beauty

and the beast. One story, an Arthurian tale of Sir Gawain, a knight of the round table illustrates this beautifully. King Arthur was once challenged by a powerful giant with the riddle, "What, above all else does a woman desire?" He travelled across the land asking women this question, but he was unsure as to whether the diverse answers he received would satisfy the giant. In a forest he came across a hag who's appearance nearly caused him to faint. He plucked up courage and asked her the question. The woman made Arthur promise to give her anything she wanted in return, before giving the answer, "A woman wants more than anything else, to exercise her free will." Arthur returned to the giant, who confirmed that this was correct. After going back to the forest, Arthur thanked her and asked her what she wanted in return. "To marry a knight of the round table," was her reply, much to Arthur's dismay.

Arthur returned to Camelot to tell his knights of the adventure, and with a saddened heart, of the old hags request. Without hesitation, Sir Gawain stood up and offered himself as husband. After the wedding, Gawain and his bride retired to the marital bed, and he turned with some fear to his new wife. To his amazement, he saw not an old hag, but the most beautiful woman he had ever known. A spell had turned her into a hag, and could only be broken if the greatest knight in Britain married her of his own free will. But one more task was to be done before the spell would be completely broken. She asked Gawain to decide if she was to be ugly by day and beautiful by night or beautiful by day and ugly by night. He thought for a while before saying that the choice was hers to make. She smiled, the spell had been completely broken and she would be her beautiful self again. Gawain had truly understood the giant's riddle.

In many cases the object of the hero's struggle is a magical or important item. This item is a symbol of some important quality that has remained unconscious. Jung gave an example of a woman patient who dreamed of discovering a sword. When asked about this sword the woman replied that it reminded her of a dagger belonging to her father. Her father was a wilful man with a powerful personality, possessed of qualities that the woman felt she lacked. By discovering this sword, she was beginning to uncover these qualities in herself (Hyde, 2000).

Return

After the struggle of initiation the hero returns triumphantly to his home, transformed by his experiences. Often, the hero is crowned king or given an important position. His victory may have revitalised the world, having vanquished the forces that threatened it. Just as the opening scene of the quest symbolises an initial psychological situation, the end scene represents the new healed or transformed inner situation; the new order in the hero's land symbolising the new order in the psyche.

Individuation and the Hidden Process

Although the heroic quest appears most explicitly in RPG and action games, the process that it symbolises, the individuation process, seems to exist at a low level in many other games. In my previous article, *The Yin and Yang of Games: Code and Content*, I described a "hidden" process found in many games:

"A game can be described at its most fundamental level as a total system; a system of changing variables, the limits and functions of which are set by the designer who can by the nature of logic, predict every outcome of every change in any variable. [Note: By variable, I do not mean the constructional elements of a programming language i.e. DWORD's, CHAR's etc., but the discrete, changing elements of a game as they are perceived by the player; the game's objects, options and playing pieces] Here, the designer has the total perspective of a god. At this perspective, there is no conflict, no excitement, just a system running perfectly. (Well, maybe with a few little bugs..)

"To create the conflict and relative unpredictability of a game we need to step inside it and take up a perspective that limits our view of the total system. This perspective is the player, or more fundamentally, the set of variables over which the user has knowledge and control. The variables over which the user has no knowledge or control are the opposition, the enemy. Often, the set of variables that comprise the player must be maintained in a certain way to retain coherence of the player perspective.

"At its most basic, the game is the process by which the player manipulates the variables at his or her disposal to create a state of completion, or of stasis in the system, by either taking control of all the opposing variables, or by eliminating them. At this point, if no further opposition is forthcoming, the player has total knowledge of the system. Now equal with the designer there is no further reason to play"(Dare, 2001).

Interestingly, this process of gradually coming to knowledge of game elements[1] is very similar to the individuation process, of gradually integrating unconscious contents into the conscious mind. In other words, the individuation process is, or can be represented in a game at a very low level; in abstract, systematic terms as well as in terms of plot or imagery. One could even say that representing this process is what games do best, and that rather than being simply a platform for storytelling or simulation, games are primarily platforms for psychological and imaginative expression.

Conclusion

The heroic quest is used almost instinctively and often unreflectively, by many developers. But by understanding its psychological interpretation and how it relates so closely to the underlying form of most video games, developers can not only make more creatively varied games, they can also create more meaningful experiences for their players.

In part four of Games and the Imagination, Integrating the Imagination, I will explore some of the ways that the Jungian perspective given here can be used in the creation of games. Amongst other things, I will explore the way that we can use the ideas of this series to widen the language of genre to a great degree, and offer a new perspective on that thorny issue of violence in games.

Notes

1: The "hidden process" is a concept still in development; it is not yet clear how much of this process is in a game, and how much is in the mind of the player. I think that there may well be a "family" of such processes, depending on the type of game, with the process described here with its symmetry and wholeness, representing an ideal. I also think that the way a player experiences and envisions this process may have similarities with the way a person comprehends and enjoys music.

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Games and the Imagination

Part Four: Integrating the Imagination

By Richard Dare

Introduction

The main theme of this series of articles has been how, by understanding the psychology of the gaming experience, we can create more powerful and meaningful experiences for players. But none of this understanding is of any use if we do not integrate it with our current design methodology. This, the final part of Games and the Imagination looks at some of the ways that we can use these new ideas to extend our games design concepts and to address difficult issues such as violence and the problems of using narrative in an interactive medium. These ideas represent only a few of the possibilities given by the Jungian approach, but in my view they are some of the most important and wide ranging. One of the most revolutionary ideas implied by this approach concerns genre, and implies that far from being the primary elements of games design, genres are in fact secondary and are encompassed by a much wider framework of ideas.

Fantasy and Genre

From time immemorial developers have divided games into distinct genres, such as the platform game, the RPG and the first-person-shooter. Although these terms are useful as a shorthand way of talking about games, their repeated use has lead them to be regarded as the primary elements of game design. This has created a very restrictive situation where many designers find it hard to see anything outside this limiting typology. The lack of wider descriptive terms forces a designer to see everything in terms of RPG or first-person-shooter, and to regard any widening of this language or the creation of a new genre as the result of some intuitive leap of genius.

But the concept of the imagination space gives us a way of overcoming this situation, a way of transcending the limits of genre by placing it within a much wider framework of ideas. In this new formulation, the primary framework is the underlying fantasy, the inner world or imagination space that the developer wishes to express in code. The developer does this by exploring the fantasy and finding particular technical devices and structures that can express it. Such devices include display techniques such as the isometric map or first person view, different types of control technique such as the point and click mechanism commonly used in the RTS and other complex structures and relationships involving multiple game objects. From this perspective, the different elements and devices that make up a game are a kind of language that is used to express an imagination space.

Certain devices work well at expressing particular fantasies, so they get used again and again often unreflectively, eventually becoming fused with the ideas they attempt to express, creating the idea of distinct genres. It would be a worthwhile undertaking, I think, to analyse a large number of games and explore how these common devices work together to evoke a particular fantasy or experience. Such an analysis would yield a large number of different building blocks and relationships that could be used independently of any particular theme.

Many developers make the mistake of focusing on these secondary devices rather than on the fantasy that they want to express. Separating the two is often very difficult, as a game designer's fantasy may contain elements of these structures. The trick is to notice the feelings associated with them, to take the primary images, feelings and themes of a fantasy and find or create the best constructional techniques to express them.

The Problem of Narrative*

The problem of narrative, of integrating a linear storyline within an interactive game is widely acknowledged as one of the most intractible problems in the field of games design. Although many techniques exist and will attract developers and gamers for a long time to come, none of them solve the Hard Problem; the problem of creating a truly dynamic narrative, of creating virtual worlds where although the themes and imagery in the world remain consistent, the actions of different players lead to utterly different and utterly credible outcomes.

To solve this problem, we need a way of designing a game where the designer sets the theme, the world-space where the game takes place, and the player can then explore and experience whatever permutations of that theme he or she desires. This seems an impossible goal, and more akin to the lucid dream or Holodeck, but I believe that we can at least lay the theoretical ground work that could make this advance possible in the future.

To create this open-ended story world we need to find a way of defining our game objects and systems so that they produce meaningful narrative changes and promote dramatic tension. We need to embed a theory of narrative into the code itself at a very low level. Just as we can drop an object into one of our game physics environments and see it react to different forces, we need to be able to create game objects that are subject to narrative forces.

In the nineteen-eighties, the well known computer scientist Brenda Laurel put forward the idea of creating an interactive world that was shaped by the "rules" of drama as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Every action and event in this hypothetical virtual world would be affected by these underlying rules, with the whole game being shaped by them as it progressed (Rheingold, 1991). At the time, expert systems were perceived as the best way of creating such a game, but creating the expert system and quantifying Aristotle's rules in a suitable way would prove very difficult.

Rather than attempt to systematise the ideas of Aristotle, I propose a system based on Jung's model of the psyche. As a dynamic system it already fits in naturally with the way games work, and mathematical models based on Jung's ideas already exist and could be utilised (Sulis, 1998). These models are useful because of the way they can handle "polymorphic sets". They have been used in psychiatry, and believe it or not, in modelling convective systems. The rules of drama, of mimesis and catharsis exist as a subset of Jung's model, in the form of the relations between the ego, the complexes, and the unconscious. Such a system would be, in effect, a simple dream simulator.

In this system, the ego would be equivalent to the player perspective (See Dare, 2001 for an explanation of this term), the unconscious would be equivalent to the game world, and the complexes would determine both the player's character and goals. The game world would be built as a dynamic, hierarchical system of archetypes, with the complexes determining how those archetypes appear and act towards the player. Every object or being in the game world would be defined by its relationship to the various archetypes, and its use and appearance to the player would be determined by his complexes. The player's path through the game would be a kind of "individuation process", working through and integrating the "complexes" that make up the player's identity, with the game world, the storyline and the player character changing coherently as a result.

These ideas are highly complex and I am still in the process of researching them, but I think that using Jung's model of the psyche as the basis of an interactive world could one day prove to be an important development in games design.

On Violence

Violence is an unavoidable and inflammatory subject in video games. Since the earliest days of the industry there have been concerns about the violent nature of many games, concerns which unfortunately have never been satisfactorily allayed by the industry's major figures. There is a feeling in the industry that it is hard to design non violent games, harder still to sell them to a predominantly young male audience. Admittedly, many of the arguments against violence in games stem from ignorance and from a misunderstanding of the gaming experience; but on the other hand, most of the arguments from the developers side have an evasive quality that does little to convince. The scientific research done on the subject has been inconclusive.

If the industry is to defeat the arguments levelled against it, it must face up to this issue. It must come to understand the range of reactions that a game can evoke and formulate a coherent way of depicting violence with psychological responsibility.

These are difficult issues, but the Jungian approach to games design can help us a great deal. Firstly, it tells us that games (and music for that matter) are not so much causes of behaviour (except perhaps in the very young) as they are catalysts, or mirrors for feelings that already exist, either consciously or unconsciously. A person may come to a game to *validate* a particular fantasy, but the game is unlikely to be a root cause. Secondly, it tells us that simply forcing people to make non-violent games will not work. A gamer will have no interest in a game if it does not in some way reflect his or her psychological situation. A gamer with a propensity towards violent fantasy will be attracted to games that mirror those concerns.

So how can designers create violent games with psychological responsibility? The answer is by creating games that depict the integration of the shadow, by taking the gamer on a journey from opposition and anger, to integration and understanding. This can be done through the storyline or through the game mechanics. One RPG design I created attempted this by having two main characters, one good and one evil. At certain points the scene would change and the player would be in control of the evil character. The story would then continue from his point of view, and the player would be forced into comprehending and undertaking decisions that would have a detrimental effect on the main, good character and the world at large. The game would gradually lead these two characters together, transforming them both, and the player would be taken along with them. Although it is easier to depict the integration of the shadow with story based games, it can be done in almost any game with a little thought.

Conclusion

Throughout this series I have discussed fantasy, a subject derided by many as irrelevant escapism. I hope I have proved in some small way that fantasy is in fact, *relevant* escapism. It is through the images of imaginative fantasy that we escape and overcome our limitations. By their enchantment our fantasies lead us away from the mundane, unquestioned life. They point out directions, signal dangers, and have the power to enrich our lives if we but learn to watch and understand them.

We have reached the end of this series of articles, but we certainly haven't finished exploring the limitless world of games and the imagination. The Jungian approach described here is not the only way we can explore this issue. In some respects, game design is an act of creative metaphysics; in making our games we are defining what a world is, and what place the player has in it. It seems to me that every theory of the world, of society and of mind could be used to explore our games. Each question answered, each puzzle solved leads to yet more questions, more mysteries and more ideas. Every section of this series could be expanded to create a series of its own, and in the future I hope to release more articles exploring these ideas in greater detail. But until then, I only hope that these articles have been as interesting and enjoyable to read as they were for me to write.

Notes

* The ideas in this section are still in development, but are included here for reasons of completeness and in the interest of sharing ideas. I hope the reader will forgive the somewhat complex nature of the discussion, and will realise that it is still in the early stages of being worked out.

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