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# GAMEPLAY AND ITS MEANINGFUL FULLNESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF METAMODERN CYBERCULTURE

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*The article is devoted to the study of the place and role of video game culture in the context of the metamodern trend; its meaningfulness and prospects in the perspective of the challenges of today's realities. On the one hand, video games are a product of neoculture, which is at the post-classical stage of its development, associated with a new type of rationality and metamodern philosophical discourse. On the other hand, video games as new media possessing symbolic, myth-making power and involving the subject in their space, in their own setting, activate archaic semantic layers. Video games have a significant impact on the mass consciousness, forming ideological and value-meaning attitudes, and can be studied as a product of mythmaking and mythodesign. In our research, we aim to explore video games as a neocultural phenomenon in the context of the post-neoclassicals present.*

*The author of the article explained that video games are an integral part of modern culture and perform constructive functions in it: they provide an opportunity to replace destructive behaviour with a socially acceptable form of play;they contribute to the symbolic satisfaction of a number of social needs (recognition, self-affirmation, power, etc.); video games provide an opportunity to construct the desired identity under the conditions of information culture. This is their therapeutic role in the situation of constant transformation of the surrounding reality, fierce competition of individuals, tendencies towards total supervision and regulation of social relations.*

*The complex techno-cultural nature of the object studied in the article requires a wide range of methodological techniques. In our scientific research, we used both general philosophical and cultural methods of research, the comparative-historical method, hermeneutic analysis, and methods of applied anthropology.*

*The phenomenon of video games was investigated by us as a product of the demands and challenges of post-non-classical neoculture, which reflects its main characteristics and the experience of the worldview of a modern person. We have accepted that video games as a neocultural phenomenon demonstrate the following features of post-non-classicism: eclecticism, the use of bricolage techniques, symbolism, co-creation and non-linearity.*

*In our research, we came to a conclusion about the importance of video games as a socio-cultural phenomenon, which has become a type of digital art and sport, which has contributed to the emergence of new forms of social organization and communication precisely because of its symbolic content and setting content; is the originator of many forms of game-related subcultural phenomena, gamification practices and specialized research programs.*

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***Key words:*** *symbol, setting, video game, metamodern, symbol, post-neoclassical culture, game, bricolage, symbolism, narrative, non-linearity, co-creation.*

# ГЕЙМПЛЕЙ ТА ЙОГО СМИСЛОВО-ЗМІСТОВА НАПОВНЕНІСТЬ В РАКУРСІ КІБЕРКУЛЬТУРИ МЕТАМОДЕРНУ

**М. С. Мельничук**

*Стаття присвячена дослідженню місця та ролі відеоігорової культури в контексті тренду метамодерну; її смислової наповненості та перспектив в ракурсі викликів реалій сьогодення. З одного боку, відеоігри є породженням неокультури, що знаходиться на постнекласичному етапі свого розвитку, пов'язаному з новим типом раціональності та філософським дискурсом метамодерну. З іншого боку, відеоігри як нові медіа, що володіють символічною, міфотворчою силою та залучають суб'єкта до свого простору, у свій власний сетинг, приводять у дію архаїчні семантичні пласти. Відеоігри мають значний вплив на масову свідомість, формуючи ідейні та ціннісно-смислові установки, і можуть бути досліджені як продукт міфотворчості та міфодизайну. В нашій науковій розвідці маємо на меті дослідити відеоігри як неокультурний феномен у контексті постнекласичного сьогодення.*

*Автором статті експліковано, що відеоігри є невід'ємною частиною сучасної культури і виконують у ній конструктивні функції: вони надають можливість заміщення деструктивної поведінки соціально прийнятною формою гри; сприяють символічному задоволенню низки соціальних потреб (у визнанні, самоствердженні, владі тощо); відеоігри надають можливість конструювати бажаної ідентичності за умов інформаційної культури. У цьому полягає їхня терапевтична роль у ситуації постійної трансформації навколишньої реальності, жорсткої конкуренції індивідів, тенденцій до тотального нагляду та регулювання суспільних відносин.*

*Складний технокультурний характер досліджуваного у статті об'єкта потребує широкого спектра методологічних прийомів. В нашій науковій розвідці ми викристовували як загальнофілософські так і культурологічні методи дослідження, порівняльно-історичний метод, герменевтичний аналіз, методи прикладної людології.*

*Феномен відеоігр досліджений нами як продукт вимог та викликів постнекласичної неокультури, що відображає основні її характеристики та досвід світовідчуття сучасної людини. нами заакцетовано, що відеоігри як неокультурний феномен демонструють такі риси постнекласики: еклектичність, використання техніки бриколажу, символізм, співтворчість та нелінійність.*

*В нашій науковій розвідці дійшли висновку щодо значущості відеоігр як соціокультурного феномену, що став до теперішнього часу видом цифрового мистецтва та спорту, що сприяв появі нових форм соціальної організації та комунікації саме завдяки своїй символічній наповненості та сетинговому змісту; є породжувачем безлічі форм навколоігрових субкультурних явищ, практик гейміфікації та спеціалізованих науково-дослідних програм.*

***Ключові слова:*** *символ, сетинг, відеогра, метамодерн, символ, постнекласична культура, гра, бриколаж, символізм, наратив, нелінійність, співтворчість.*

**Formulation of the problem.** From the second half of the last century, the active penetration of computer and digital technologies into the culture and everyday life of a person began, which significantly transformed the appearance of many traditional cultural forms and practices.It was at this time that the phenomenon of video games emerged as a kind of virtual-digital screen culture. At the beginning of their formation, the games had an entertaining character, but later they were destined to outgrow this format and declare themselves as a multifaceted and polyphonic phenomenon. We believe that in the modern world they contribute to the generation of new socio-cultural practices and the expansion of the boundaries of anthropological identity,

they become a space for the explication of a renewed understanding of creativity, life, freedom, artistic and aesthetic values, cultural and ethical meanings.

**The relevance of this problem** lies in the fact that, having appeared relatively recently, video games quickly became a significant segment of the leisure sphere. They changed behavioural skills and gave birth to new traditions, influencing the structure of society. The emergence of scientific interest in computer games and the changes they bring to the cultural and social spheres begins at the end of the 20th century. However, serious scientific results revealing the essence of this phenomenon have not yet been developed. There are works in the fields of psychology, sociology, which try to establish the status of computer games, however, there is no global study that approaches computer video games from philosophical and cultural and anthropological positions.

**The degree of development of this problem.** Computer video games are a relatively new field of research and practice. Beginning with the end of the 20th century, the first attempts to understand computer video games were made. Despite the high rate of spread, this phenomenon has not been studied in depth enough. The largest amount of research devoted to virtual computer games has been done in the United States and Western Europe in connection with the most developed industry of computer games.In connection with the absence of such a developed media entertainment industry on the domestic territory as in the West, the study of computer games in terms of the scope of the work performed is not yet as large as in the countries of the Western world. When studying this problem, it is worth focusing on the works of Johan Huizing (describes the space of human activity and culture as an immense playing field, as a comprehensive way and universal category of human existence.); K. Squire and J. Bogost (emphasis on the use of game culture videos in the learning process); K. Kull and T. Maran (problems of semiotics in the modern world). Also, in our research, we relied on the works of A. Koron, B. Jason, etc. Among the modern Ukrainian researchers who showed their scientific interest in gamification, especially in the perspective of education, it is worth mentioning O. Tkachenko, A. Tokareva, O. Horban.

Most of the research conducted on the subject of computer games examines them from the point of view of technological and digital aspects, and not from humanitarian aspects - that is, from the point of view of the genesis of this object, its content and influence on modern culture. The main approaches to the study of computer video games in the focus of Ukraine from a humanitarian point of view are psychological. They study the formation of addiction to computer games and the psychological prerequisites for the game process.

**The goal of our research** is to analyze and explain the phenomenon of video games as a phenomenon of the modern world in the focus of metamodernity; as a result of the challenges of compliance and the rapid development of nanotechnology in the perspective of the information society. Also, let's focus our interest on the study of the imagery of the setting and the semiotic content of the video game neoculture.

**Presenting main material.** Today's realities pay more and more attention to computer technologies, which to one degree or another directly or indirectly affect human life. Computer games are one of the rapidly developing areas of computer technology. The video game helps modern man to try to find answers in deep philosophical questions of freedom, good and evil, love, suffering, war and peace, as well as to realize his creative abilities. A number of works were devoted to the cultural and psychological aspects of video game culture, which is directly related to the perceptual perception of an alternative reality and its impact on the cultural and mental content of a person.However, in addition to these aspects, one more – symbolic one can be highlighted. It

consists in the semantic vision of computer reality and the perception of sacred signs and symbols encrypted in the game.

The semantic aspect is closely related to the cultural aspect, since any symbols originate in culture, and the prototypes of signs in computer games are actually existing or invented objects of reality, that is, the symbolism of computer games is not separated from real life, but takes into it has its beginning. There is no game where the symbol was invented. Even the monitor screen is a kind of portal into another reality. This window, which "screens" virtual reality, has the property of magically transforming the desired into the real, the fantastic into the real.

For the most part, modern games rely on the symbolism of religions, occult communities, and ancient beliefs. It happens that objects of nature become the symbol of a computer game. For example, in the series of games Obscure I, Obscure II, the main symbol is a flower.In general symbolism, the flower has a positive connotation, although there is another interpretation of this symbol. His dualism consists in the fact that, on the one hand, the flower personifies perfection, kindness, youth, a symbol of nature, as well as death, rebirth and brevity of existence. The latter value is best suited to the interpretation of the entire game, because the player must survive each level and fight monsters until he reaches the flower. The red flower, which is characteristic of this series of games, symbolizes the fragility of existence, the blood of the deities and the fleetingness of time. And again, we can trace the reflection of symbolism in the plot itself. The peace and tranquillity of the American college was so disturbed that its students began to turn into monsters, that is, the existence of one being was interrupted.

The symbolism of computer reality depends entirely on the plot of the game, and sometimes on the directed actions of the player. A vivid example is the symbol of the crow in the game of the genre of interactive cinema "Fahrenheit: Indigo Prophesy". Its interpretation can be based not only on the plot, thus giving a negative colour, but also on the vision of the unreal world of the player, thanks to the plot platform, the location aspect. When it comes to video games, the word "setting" comes up quite often. This term comes from the English word setting – "premises, setting" – and, according to one definition, means "the time, place and circumstances in which events develop" [9]. In the context of video game culture, the setting is the environment in which the action takes place. It is he who determines the time period, the environment and the basic rules by which the game world of the cyber underworld works [22]. Considering the fact that the more the player is surrounded by a new reality, the more he is absorbed by the story setting, the more symbolic signs he is able to distinguish.So, if we talk about the symbolism of the raven in the context of the plot, it can be associated with the kingdom of the dead and with the earth, but at the same time also with the sky. Therefore, the raven is given the function of a mediator between the three worlds and is attributed with wisdom and the ability to predict.His image is associated with misfortune and death. This is the main setting idea – to the maximum, using the imagery and symbolism of the gameplay, to immerse and dissolve the player in the "reality" of the presented cyberspace.

Many video games assume symbolism, which can be carried out on different levels – semantic, narrative, figurative-visual, intertextual, etc. In general, nowadays psychoanalysis often uses mythological plots to interpret its ideas, which was written by P. Ricker [8]. In video games, psychoanalytic ideas are actively used in the structure of the narrative and the images of the characters.Take the game Silent Hill 2 (2001) as an example. The main character – James Sunderland – comes to the gloomy town of Silent Hill, having received a letter in which there is a possible meeting with his wife named

Mary. However, as it turns out, his wife died three years ago and it is not clear who is the author of the letter. After arriving in the city, strange events begin to happen to the hero.He meets a girl named Maria, who looks a lot like his dead wife, but she works as a stripper at a local club. Later, various monsters begin to appear on the streets of the city, with which the main character begins to fight. And gradually it becomes clear that the city itself chose James in order to make him suffer (after all, he killed his sick wife three years ago, unable to see her suffering, and after that he lost his memory).In the city, James meets people who have also committed crimes under the influence of circumstances, and the city makes them suffer. Here we meet Angela, a girl who killed her father, who raped her.James saves her from a monster (Abstract Daddy), which looks like two bodies covered in flesh, whose movements resemble sexual intercourse. Classic psychoanalytic plots referring to children's psychological trauma are evident here. James meets Eddie Dombrowski – a guy who suffers from excess weight and believes that he is laughed at and mocked by others. Eddie meets James with a gun in his hands and surrounded by dead bodies, trying to reassure them that he wasn't the one who killed them.It becomes obvious that monsters are a projection of fears, negative emotions and unconscious desires. So, for example, James meets such monsters as a Mannequin, which are creatures made of two pairs of female legs; a nurse (Zombie Nurse), who embodies a female image in the form of a nurse with bloody bandages wrapped around her head, hiding her face. These monsters reflect the repressed erotic desires of James, whose wife has been ill for a long time, and at the same time refer to the meanings associated with the loci of illness and the hospital [6]. It is interesting to note that mostly monsters are creatures made up of human body parts. We could say that psychoanalytic images are manifested here, referring to the ideas of J. Deleuze and F. Guattari about the "body without organs" [14]. It is difficult to say whether the developers thought about such ideological parallels or not, but the video game itself quite adequately reflects the post-classical attitudes and reinterpretation of psychoanalytic plots: projections of one's internal topology of desires and fears onto the topos of space, the idea of the traumatic nature of reality as such.

Neomythologism as a creative borrowing and processing of images of classical culture and mythology, their eclectic combination and remelting into new artistic forms becomes one of the significant characteristics of modern culture. Modern visual culture, using collage and eclecticism, constructs a neomyth that refers us to myths, fairy tales and other genres of literature and theatre [16]. Eclectic here is consistent with the archaic method of bricolage. K. Lévi-Strauss described bricolage as a kind of logical way of establishing meaningful relationships between phenomena, which contributes to solving fundamental contradictions, characteristic of mythological thinking. The bricoler creates a new semantic and figurative unity based on the already existing set of means and tools, conducting a kind of inventory [16]. Researchers have also discovered the effect of such bricolage logic in modern art, where artistic bricolage allows building "a field of blurred meanings around a common semantic core" [18: 154] and finds its mark in collages, assemblages, installations, readymades, etc.

Modern video games (primarily in the genres of Fantasy and Adventures) in their setting conduct a kind of game with a mythological archaic content. A similar example of layering and bricolage can be the games of The Elder Scrolls series, where in the visual plan there are examples of architecture that draw a vector to Gothic, Romanesque styles and Greek classics, and in the plot and game narrative there are ideas of the repetition of the historical process and the idea of combining the past and today's.Here we can also find a reference to Christianity, a reinterpretation of Augustinian

projective metaphors in which history is like a flying arrow, together with the ideas of the cycle reflected in Stoicism and Nietzscheanism. In the dialogues and monologues of the heroes, if you carefully analyze them, you can find a combination of the ideas of Stoic philosophy and neo-Kantianism, and even some modern constructivist views. In general, many games of the RPG genre eclectically combine figurative, value-semantic and cultural-historical layers of different eras together, creating their own virtual whole, the space of a new myth, in which the action of the game takes place. As a rule, the mythology of a certain people is not present here in its pure form, it is subject to creative reinterpretation and change and only refers us to well-known mythological images and plots. In addition to using archetypal elements, video games also produce acrotypical images of mass culture, transforming traditional mythological images and weaving them into a mosaic picture of the world of modern man. Acrotype images are correlated with the modern vision of the hero and the heroic in the conditions of mass culture. Such, for example, are the images of a superhero, a soldier of honour, a cool macho, a fatal beauty. Examples of games exploiting similar templates are the Resident Evil, Far Cry game series [1].

Ideas of the author's co-creation and the concept of an open work "which is determined by the "field" of various interpretive possibilities" [14], the transfer of the narrative centre to the reader, the combination of episodes accessible to the average consumer and the presence of deeper meanings, the actualization of which requires a fairly high degree of erudition and intellectual cultures are fully manifested in modern video games, which allows us to consider them as a product of post-non-classical culture.Traditionally, works of cinema and literature do not assume such interactivity and active intervention of the subject. Here, the reader's participation is limited to trying to guess the key ideas, make evaluative judgments, actualize certain interpretive perspectives. Video games are a new medium that creates a type of narrative in which interactivity and the subject's freedom of action are key. E. Aarset understands video games as a text in a broad sense, as a cybertext, a form of ergodic literature.In the work "Cybertext: perspectives of ergodic literature", he introduces the term "ergodic literature", which requires a non-trivial effort from the reader for its reading [11: 77]. If in classical novels the reader only needs to slide his eyes through the pages of the book in the correct order, then the plot of ergodic literature must be built by the reader himself. Many video games have the features of ergodic literature, since in them, in order to gain access to the development of the plot, it is also necessary to make various efforts, to perform physical actions that directly affect the development of the game. Each user gets a different result, which depends on the choice. Cybertext is a text that is directly influenced by the user, while remaining a consumer of the text.

E. Aarset writes that if the interpretation of the written text occurs in the subject's head, then the cybertext user controls the text directly. It produces a difficult hermeneutic interpretation of the text, but actually creates a new text, physically, influencing and transforming textual structures. Thus, the meanings embedded in the works of literature and cinema, the emotions that the subject feels from their perception, his interpretation options are largely determined by the author, while in video games the player constructs his own meanings and experiences during the game. In some video games, the player needs to complete the meaning and plot himself. So, for example, in the Dark Souls series of games, the player has to build the plot in many ways on his own, focusing on small amounts of information provided through the dialogues of the characters during the gameplay. The developers even released a special encyclopedia in which

information about the plot and characters is presented – an interesting phenomenon in itself – a kind of narrative about a narrative.In some ways, it resembles the literary experiments of U. Eco, who wrote the intellectual novel "The Name of the Rose" [11: 44], and then released "Notes in the Margins of "The Name of the Rose" [11: 45], which are a kind of reference book-guide to the novel, which explains complex passages and various references to historical and philosophical plots that are not entirely obvious to the inexperienced reader.The choice itself, which many video games offer, often does not imply the existence of a certain "correct" option. In games, we encounter the relativity of the categories of good and evil. This can also be correlated with the teachings of post-non-classical culture related to moral relativism. Moreover, this relativism turns out to be filled with a kind of "existential specificity", the need for action, which involves the development of the dynamics of the game, and not abstract evaluative considerations without the need to perform specific actions.

Video games as new media involve the subject in the process of creating meanings and knowing reality. In them, the audience becomes a direct participant, actively uses the instrumental capabilities of modern information and communication technologies. As a result of user manipulations, the very structure and form of organization of information, images, objects and text changes. The creativity of the players themselves is built into the structure of the gameplay. K. Kremin explores video games as a form of art that is created by developers and players who "enliven" the game [14: 58]. He points out that we don't just play video games, we create them in the process. Based on the works of J. Deleuze and F. Guattari, K. Kremin considers video games as an artistic form for which the action itself becomes an integral part of aesthetics and which is characterized by the immersiveness and interaction of its various elements (players, avatars, game objects).He writes that the player, holding the controller in his hands, becomes part of the "machine assemblage", expanding in this way to what is happening on the screen. We expand the limits of our physicality with the help of video games, investing in them our powers, skills, actions, feelings and emotions, etc. And this is the main thing that distinguishes video games from other art forms - the aesthetic component of video games is realized only in the process of the game itself and with the participation of players [14: 63].

M. McLuhan also noted that electronic media, being an extension of the nervous system of a modern person, make him an active participant in the communication process. So, for example, the viewer engages in a constant creative dialogue with the image on the screen. Electronic media return man to a tribal state in which myth reigns. Based on M. McLuhan, we can say that today the new tribal community of electronic culture, united in one network, makes the subject not just an active consumer, but also a creator, which video games clearly demonstrate. The strength of modern mythmaking, according to M. McLuhan, lies in the rejection of electronic media as mythical forms by the consumer in favor of the producer. "The viewer or reader must now be the creator" [17: 345]. Thus, we can consider video games as a phenomenon of metamodern culture, involving the audience in the creative process, which is a new mythological dimension.Non-linearity as a key characteristic of the post-non-classical type of rationality is consistent with modern information and communication technologies and global society. Irreversibility, disequilibrium, non-linearity create order out of chaos in the new unstable world. Non-linearity is a feature that brings together video games and post-neoclassical scientific as well as philosophical ideas.In modern video games, these ideas are realized in the non-linearity of the narrative and gameplay. Of course, we can find video games with no narrative at all, and with a rigidly set plot line, the change of

which is almost impossible to influence. However, often in video games, especially in the RPG genre, there are branching storylines, many alternate scenarios and quests that can be completed in almost any order and at any time. Games with an open world (Grand Theft Auto III, 2001) and sandbox mode (Minecraft series of games), in which the player can act freely by following or disabling game objectives or building them independently, most fully embody the principle of non-linearity.

**Conclusion.** The inexorable present calls into question the basic assumptions of classical culture about the universality of truths and laws of existence, undermines the traditional opposition between the possible and the real, and carries out the successive destruction of the subject opposition and each of its components. This leads to a fragmented world of metamodern culture with its eclecticism, polyphony, polysemanticism, multi-layeredness and the possibility of combining the incompatible according to the principle "everything is allowed". Today's culture is quite complex and multi-layered, its phenomena contain many layers of meaning and interpretive perspectives.As an example, we can cite modern art, which involves different semantic readings and provides an opportunity for in-depth interpretation, relevant to elite intellectual circles, and at the same time refers us to the life experience and common ideas of the information space of an ordinary consumer of mass culture. Modern visual culture and modern art demonstrate these features to us quite vividly.

Video games are a vivid phenomenon of metamodern culture, in which its main imperatives are manifested. We considered the reflection of only a few features of neoculture (eclecticism and bricolage, symbolism, co-creation, non-linearity) in the transcription of video games. Like other phenomena of post-neoclassical culture, such as, for example, modern art, video games are heterogeneous with respect to different levels of semantic content: here, orientation towards the mass consumer can coexist simultaneously with the presence of semantic layers for an intellectually oriented recipient. Video games are multi-layered, intertextual and semantically heterogeneous, eclectically combining various cultural elements using the technique of artistic bricolage. We have also shown that video games are a new medium that is capable of forming a neo-mythological space, building it on the basis of a game with archaic mythological semantics and symbolism, and involving the subject in the creative process. The narrative component of many video games assumes a non-linear structure, which also reveals their belonging to the post-neoclassic. The presence of complex narrative changes in games is most often associated with the need to solve moral dilemmas, the essence of which is correlated with the moral relativism of metamodernism in general. The interactivity, non-linearity, immersiveness of video games, the presence of bifurcation possibilities within the framework of the gameplay make the game a vivid phenomenon of modern culture. The complex narrative device is often consonant with symbolism in its various manifestations (setting, player actions, characters, topos of space and chronotopes), which often resonates with psychoanalytical trends of thought that have become an integral part of the modern cultural space, attention to the "reification" of the world, all this is also an integral part of the content of modern video games. The content-semantic aspect is the broadest and multifaceted. It contains not only the idea of the game itself, its basis, but can also be transformed under the actions of the player to acquire a positive or negative color. In most games, you can identify a leading character that appears throughout the game and is the link between the player and the story.

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