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Conference Paper

Ludic Transgression of Being in a Postmodern Culture

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Abstract

The subject of this article is games as a form and mode of *being* considered through the prism of transgression. Contemporary individuals lose themselves in a ludic mode of being, shifting the boundaries of the discourse so that the original meaning is replaced, dissolving in the confluence of multiple positions and ways of existence, thus allowing a person to transgress the law and the foundation without abolishing the traditional norm. Individual transgression becomes a way of satisfying unattainable desires, an act and a form of self-realization and self-presentation.

Keywords: game, game practices, transgression, being, postmodern culture

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1. Introduction

Postmodernism's foundational ideas not only redefine space, time, phenomenality and potential of game practices – they highlight an act of transgression (crossing the border between the possible and the impossible) as an act that most readily conforms to the everyday mode of being.

Transgression (Greek *trans* – through; *gress* – movement) as a "fact of transcending the limits" (M.Foulcault, G.Bataille, G.Deleuze and others) allows our contemporary to transform the world by constructing their own supra-natural worlds [1–3]. Secular rational culture does not invent a supra-natural world – it strives to present the real world as changed, differing from the present. Fantasy and irreality encourage humans to explore the forbidden tabooed topics; they allow to disregard rules and procedures, norms and values. By exploring moments of irreality, we become aware of the real world and master the familiar and the ordinary through the strangeness, the 'other' that replaces our reality. Transgression allows us to come in touch with our fears and desires, creating a worldview where supernatural is playing with the tradition, opposing or changing it. It commands a person to be something they are not.

Every culture reveals itself through a unique human activity: a search for meaning. Modern game practices become the form and the tool through which the humans discover and explain the meaning of the world – first for themselves, and then in their exchange with 'the other'. This is the subject of our research.

2. Game Practices in the Modern World

By creating a resilient model, a game makes it possible to re-use this model repeatedly adjusting it to the current situation and modifying it indefinitely. Game ontology shows that a game is an eternal return, where all achievements and results are only a stage or a temporary stop, but never a final goal. Based on the internal transgression of the discourse space, game practices allow to shift the borders of discourse from one perspective to another, thereby not erasing the original meaning, but replacing it, dissolving it in a confluence of multiple meanings, positions and modes of existence, where the truth or unequivocal certainty are impossible to achieve. Ludic transgression becomes a mode of life that allows people to break the law or foundation without abolishing the traditional norms. Often a person would take a risk, bluff or break a taboo for the purpose of experiencing a thrill, anxiety, drive and tension by overcoming him/herself.

Games of chance are rooted in a desire to understand the first causes of all existing objects and phenomena. Gambling thrill, like intoxication, switches off the consciousness creating a belief in irrational forces and superpowers. Our contemporaries find the new ways and means by which they think to imbue their life with meaning, sense or facticity. In crisis periods of life or during the destabilizing shifts in society, an individual is drawn to risk; they are tempted to try their fortune, fate, even life itself. This is what determines the popularity of ludic practices: virtual games, gaming machines, casinos, bookmakers, poker, lotteries, where our contemporaries find the emotions they crave – the emotions associated with the success that provide motivation to try another game. These pursuits may also bring material rewards, allowing to receive prize money without hard work. An illusion of 'easy money' also motivates our contemporaries to participate in these organized transgressions. An experience of ludic transgression helps our contemporaries to endure the burden of social necessity. Transgressive principle can be provisionally divided into an organized transgression and an individual transgression. For example, historically, transgressive principle has been always present in all ritual festivals, sacrifices and warfare, which were traditionally supported by ludic practices.

Individual transgression occurs when an individual allows him/herself to satisfy his or her desires as they want, disregarding ethical norms. Most of the time this transgression occurs in youth, when modern young people explore, master and transform the sociocultural space.

Game, which is a primary form of human activity and a factor of human onto- and phylogenesis, is perceived as a natural process, even though it is organized around an artificial procedure. It is acted out in reality and easily transplants an individual into the non-existent ephemeral worlds. Often our contemporaries plan their life strategies by using astrology, divination, or magical practices, thereby utilizing a ludic choice as a guidance, instead of taking personal responsibility and rational approach.

The reality of action is transformed into a procession of concrete acts committed in real time; however, life problems are solved in game practices through a certain convention, an irrationality based on fantasy and an illusory world. The result is a situation which is actualized through a conventional action – that is, a transgression of being. Our contemporaries create an illusionary world meant for a real life; in this world, people compensate for their inability to act in reality by ludically imitating every possible solution to life crises.

Postmodern individual constantly searches and creates *actual* transgressive situations, where destruction and creation, violence and seduction produce an internal harmony. This is exemplified by the activities popular among the young people – parcour, drift, roofing, digging, stalking, survivalism, quest, etc. – where risk, gamble and danger create a new system of meaning and a new frame of reference.

3. Characteristics of the Social Game Industry

Similar factors underpin the social games industry that promotes not only overcoming of obstacles and positive emotions, but also a negative experience, even revulsion. *Factor strakha* ('Fear factor'), *Posledniy geroy* ('The Last Hero'), *Bitva titanov* ('Clash of the Titans'), *Ostat'sya v zhivykh* ('Lost'), *Gonka geroyev* ('Hero Race') and others: these are just a few of the sociocultural games where people compete with each other, erasing the borders between what is possible and what is not, using the pre-arranged rules, transgressing norms and principles, acting against all standards and ethical coordinates. The players often agree to experience humiliations, deprivations and hardships for the sake of a large monetary award that would be acquired not by diligent labor but as a payment for a role well performed.

Having lost a steady sociocultural guidance, contemporary individual strives to build his/her personal interactions based on the templates and pre-existing clichés; their life-story is played out according to a scenario or a pre-arranged storyline. Being itself becomes a simulacrum, a game emulating the real and the valuable, by striving to exist according to the pre-set standards and canons of mass culture based on creativity and substitution of real characters with the screen images (imitation of stars, famous artists, politicians, TV personalities, etc.). People try to fit into the images forced upon them by the advertisement industry; they try to conform with the pre-set visual symbols, constantly emulating them and creating artificial selves. The search for a novel self is limited by the consumerist approach to goods and services, by the desire for the new experiences, feelings and emotions devoid of the transcendent content.

Our contemporaries become used to playing somebody else's life. Ideal models of such life are presented by the TV shows ('Dom 1,2,3…', 'Kulinarnyi poedinok', 'Edim doma', 'Poka vse doma', 'Po domam', 'Pust' 'govoryat', etc.). People love to watch the lives of successful people; their lives become a model and an example to follow. Although at first the viewer is aware that these video scenarios are playacted, he or she cannot and does not want to separate the real reality from the imagined grotesque, thus slowly introducing some of this playact into his or her life.

Everyday reality is increasingly perceived as a TV show or a spectacle, becoming imbued with the atmosphere of an action on screen. Virtual space creates a new vision and a need to construct a different image, or multiple diverse images; it requires different ways of communication and new technologies of self-representation. Real life is increasingly perceived by our contemporaries as something unreal, temporary, easily changed. Long-term life strategy planning gives way to the short-term situations alternating and compiling in real life.

Online space, cinema, TV, virtual reality, new life technologies – these are just a few of the multiple tools available to create a personal alternative reality.

The world seduces individuals with the opportunities inherent in an abundance of goods and services. The reality of living on credit (whether financial, social or anthropological) creates a desire for satisfaction which will never be fulfilled, because of the special effect influence of the cinema, TV, advertising posters, new speeds of movement and of life, an abundance of different simultaneously presented meanings of human existence.

The 'transpositional' character of modern society has not so much abolished the oppositions, but rather created an artificial world where the 'male–female', 'beautiful–ugly', 'great–small', 'black–white', etc. borders are erased. The majority of the people

'improve' their nature by realizing themselves in the transvestite, bodybuilding, tatoo, piercing and other cultures. They are the means to construct self-identity, reveal individual unfulfilled needs and desires to the world and transcend the limits of personal possibilities and dreams.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we would like to note that contemporary individuals reside in an imaginary world governed by the success of the virtual space, easy changes in personal image, abundance of sketch shows, and overwhelming irony regarding the self and others. Human life space doubles as a game space, where reality is intertwined with the irreal moments (virtual communication, a network of multiple image-selves within one day, the carnival character of informational environment, etc.). Game becomes a tool or a technology used by our contemporaries to bring order to their existence by harmonizing its spatio-temporal characteristics and erasing boundaries between what is possible and what is not. A modern individual constantly switches from one life project to another adjusting to the external realities by using playful aesthetization of his or her intellectual and physiological resources, trying to imbue a chaotic reality with meaning, sense and system. A focus on the self and on one's own life as a kind of model of postmodern game is driven by the search for self-limit, a personal transgression beyond the rational explanation.

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