

Rethink Game Design through Feminist Methodologies: a Case Study

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Abstract

In recent years an increasing awareness has been posed on the relationship between gender and game design. Starting from the question about "What a feminist perspective can bring to the design of video games?", this paper describes a case study about the application of feminist methodologies into a game design workshop. Through the description of the methods used in the workshop, our research suggests how methodological contributions could represent a crucial element for critically reformulating game design and expanding the possible imaginaries and practices.

Summary

In recent years an increasing awareness has been posed on the relationship between **gender and game design**. In this context is particularly important to focus on the need to introduce a **critical perspective**, capable of questioning the strategies of representation and the contexts of production and usage. This means introducing, into the world of videogames, tools capable of expanding the possible imaginaries and thus encouraging a greater participation of biowomen^[1] both as users and as creators.

Starting from this need, our project focuses on exploring how the use of **feminist methodologies** (Harding, 1989) in game design can be a crucial element to reformulate practices and imaginaries. **Our work is based on considering methodology as a procedural and generative instrument**. Unlike the creation of a finished product, the implementation of new methodological models can be considered as a device capable of providing tools for the production and generation of new imaginaries and ways of doing things.

From these premises, our work is based on an action-research approach, oriented toward using methods reappropriated from feminist practices within a game design workshop. Our initial hypothesis was that the use of feminist tactics would facilitate the participants's interest in game design, enabling the creation of new imageries and generating a sense of competence and empowerment.

This research was carried out through the organization of a workshop in the seminar "*Xoy1 Digital Industry and Gender*". The workshop lasted 4 hours and involved a total of 13 women and 4 men of different ages. Its objective was the collective creation of a series of prototypes of mini-games capable of offering a critical perspective to the topics of subjectivity and identity in the Internet. The workshop was based on the re-appropriation and **remix of feminist (Espínola, 2010) and theatrical methodologies** (Boal, 2004) and was situated from a post-feminist, ironic and parodic perspective (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1995).

^[1] Term coined by Beatriz Preciado, she adds the suffix "bio" to distinguish the idea of biological woman and concept of women and men as a social construction (Preciado, 2008).

Method

The methodologies used were based on three key concepts: **embodied experience, synesthetic thinking and intersubjectivity**. These concepts have been treated from the perspective of the **mistake, the parody and the play**. Embodied experience has been addressed through the use of theatrical techniques oriented towards putting the body into action, as a physical socio-semiotic instance to rethink and share common experiences. The synesthetic thinking has been used to translate ideas proceeding from a logocentric field of

knowledge (cultural studies) to visual, theatrical and plastic languages, in order to explore the semiotic values of the materials. To enact intersubjectivity we used the sharing of subjective experiences as the starting point for ideating games. Participants were invited to share their personal experiences related to "subjectivity /identity and internet" and to use their reciprocal narrations as raw materials for game design. This method allowed us to use the subjectivity as the ground of conflict and political action and the intersubjectivity as other mirrors where to look and to be looked.

Expected Outcomes

At the end of the workshop many participants told us that now they feel that it was possible and easy to start designing games. At the same time they prototyped different games capable of implementing novel mechanics and proposing new imaginaries. The use of this methodology allowed new subjectivities to be brought into game design and thus it opened paths for generating new ways of designing games. This experience was situated in the context of a meeting related to gender issues; in order to validate its effectiveness it will be necessary to expand the research on the use of these methodologies in other contexts.