Feeling So Real – a phenomenological exploration into the realities of emotions in play

olli leino
IT-University of Copenhagen
Center for Computer Games Research
<leino@itu.dk>

ABSTRACT

In recent studies on emotions and computer games the experiential side of emotions is often left uncharted due to methodological constraints. Regarding a comprehensive understanding on computer games and emotions such ignorance is untenable. By basing its analysis on an experience already lived as an emotional playing experience, this paper examines emotions in play in regard to both their qualities and the totalities in which their objects reside. The paper investigates the grounds on which some emotions in play could be said to be more real than others and suggests the existence of at least two totalities of emotions in play: the deniable and the undeniable.

Introduction

Like the title suggests, the focus of this paper is on emotions as experienced by players, not on emotions for example as observed, measured or paraphrased. Emotion as experienced refers to the answer to the question "what it's like to have that emotion?", instead of for example to "what happens when someone is having that emotion?"[1] Thus, the experiences scrutinized here are experiences already lived as emotional experiences. The same notion extends also to the view taken on playing. Computer games are made for humans, but technically they could be, and are played by non-humans as well. The following quote is from the FAQ of WoW Glider, a program that can be used to free the human player from the tedious task of playing World of Warcraft (2004):

> "Q: Will it fish?
> A: Yes, Glider has an option to create fishing profiles. […]"[2]

If one wanted to study the possibilities World of Warcraft offers for fishing, such program might be of great help. Similarly, for studying Chess, the tour-de-force of Deep Blue against Garri Kasparov in 1997 might be very informative. But, as the emphasis is on emotions in play as lived experiences, one has to look at the playing carried out not by programs, agents, or implied players but humans made of flesh and blood, having their worries about upcoming exams and occasional needs to carry out other activities than playing. There is no intention to be able to distinguish playing from other activities or emotions from other mental states. Emotions and playing may as well be analysed as being something that can be measured with scientific instruments or as consisting of building blocks whose content can be known in scientific terms, but in this paper, they are treated as *experienced* and as involving *meanings*. What is said about emotions and playing in this paper is an outreach from a first-person perspective instead of an attempt of exclusive framing. The bodily dimension of the lived experience is important to both meanings and to emotions, but in this paper it does not receive the attention it would deserve.

---

[1] These questions are adapted from Solomon (2004), who uses them for a slightly different purpose.
[2] http://www.wowglider.com/FAQ.aspx#P8

In recent years, computer games and emotions has become a popular research topic. Computer game designers and scholars from different traditions alike have shown interest at games' abilities to elicit emotions in their players. Player's experience and particularly, its emotional side seem to be areas that contemporary game studies have only recently started to explore. Also the popular talk about games has adopted emotions as its topic. Particularly interesting are those statements, such as Peralta (2006) and Pratchett (2006) that are suggestive of the longing for games that can elicit "real emotions" or emotions with "more depth". Do those statements express the need for games to elicit really the same kind of emotions one would experience when encountering a bear in the forest or becoming a parent, or is their scale, on which the "realness" is articulated, somehow different from the one that applies in real life? This paper asks if, and, on which grounds some emotions in play could be said to be more real than others. From the chosen point of view this paper cannot question the reality of any emotion in play, but is able to explore how games as existing in reality are experienced in the emotions.

Intentional emotions

Solomon (2006, 301) writes that "an emotional experience is primarily an experience of the object of emotion from the peculiar perspective of that emotion." To say that emotions are about things in the world is to say that they are intentional. That emotions are intentional, is, according to Solomon (2004, 2), an "idea that has been well-confirmed even by those theorists who set out to challenge it." Thus, for the purposes of this paper I take for granted that emotions are intentional. Stating that emotions, besides having many other properties not explored in this paper, are intentional, lands them with interesting conceptual interfaces. To explore those and eventually come to a definition of emotion used in this paper, I will make a quick plunge into the concept of intentionality.

It is due to intentionality that in one's mental acts, such as emotions, one can have particular senses of things thus be conscious of things. Thus, intentionality is a basic feature of consciousness, which is often glibly described as the "aboutness" of mental acts. The concept of intentionality originates from Brentano (1973, 88-89), according to whom it is a quality that is exclusive to mental phenomena (no physically existing object can be intentional) and which every mental phenomena have. Brentano's thesis about intentionality in its original form is rather bold, and its interpretation may lead to problems, which are discussed briefly in order to clarify the concept.

The idea of all mental phenomena being intentional is easily distracted by mental states like moods. An example is grumpiness, which does not necessarily involve a sense of anything. And to say that only mental phenomena can give us senses of things seems problematic as well. Consider a portrait of Tarja Halonen, the president of Finland. It surely gives the subject a sense of something, but clearly is not a mental state. But the sense the portrait gives to the subject depends on the subject herself. By looking at the picture, some people may get a sense of, for example, Moomin Mamma, the mother of Moomin Troll. Giving the sense of Tarja Halonen, Moomin Mamma, Conan O'Brien, or whoever, is not built-in in the portrait, in other words, is not an intrinsic property of the portrait. To avoid the aforementioned problems McIntyre & Smith (1989, 148) suggest a modified version of Brentano's conception of intentionality, to cover all mental acts that give the subject a sense of something; "all and only mental phenomena are intrinsically intentional". As the attempt here is not to discuss the concept of intentionality, but to use it in order to understand emotions in play, the modified version of Brentano's thesis solves the problems to a necessary extent.

An example follows. While standing on the sidewalk and waiting to cross the road during the afternoon rush hour I see the traffic lights counting down seconds on a two-digit display before the light turns from red to green. I know that those numbers refer to seconds and when they reach zero, the signal light kindly stops the passing traffic and thus grants me a safe passage over the road. Regardless of the good the traffic lights can do for me, this time they increase the time I have to spend on my from work. As it seems that I'm going to be late from a meeting, waiting seems unpleasant, I keenly anticipate crossing the road and blame the "stupid traffic lights" for delaying me. This is to demonstrate that in emotion a particular kind of sense of the object is involved. Intentionality depends on that particular sense. An emotion about for example "hazardous traffic lights" would be something completely different. In other words, as intentional states of mind, emotions are concept-dependent. It is also possible that due to having other things in mind I may have ignored the numbers reaching zero and the light turning green already. In that case in extra-mental reality would be nothing corresponding to the sense of "stupid traffic lights" any more. That would not stop me from having emotions toward the stupid traffic lights, as I may have as well hallucinated the stupidity of the traffic lights, the existence of the traffic lights, if not even the whole idea of going to meet someone. In other words; intentionality is not dependent on the extra-mental existence or properties of the object and thus emotions as intentional states of mind are existence-independent. (McIntyre & Smith 1989, 148-151.) Thus, as intentional, with the help of senses of things involved in them, emotions can be about things in the world. But one should not put too much weight on the thing in the world, as an emotion can be undergone regardless of the existence of its object.

Consequences of these two notions are that when one is for example angry, one is always angry at something. Likewise, loving, for example, is impossible if there is nothing to love. An emotion always needs to involve a sense of its object. One can also have different emotions about the same object. But that emotions as experienced are about objects is not enough to constitute a definition, as I can have experiences about traffic lights or Gordon Freeman, the protagonist of the first-person shooter game *Half-Life 2* (2004), without experiencing any emotion. With respect to Sajama (1996, 258) and the modified Brentano's thesis (McIntyre & Smith 1989, 148) in mind, I turn to Aristotle, who, in Nichomachean Ethics, defined passions as "appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain" (Aristotle 350BCEa, II 5, Aristotle 1989, II 5) To Aristotle, what defines passion is the involvement of pleasure or pain. This seems valid, as one's every experience that is lived as an emotional experience is accompanied with the quality of being either enjoyable or discomforting. The specific words are not important here, we might as well say that all emotions are experienced as either positive or negative, or as being enjoyable or discomforting. The actual qualities of the lived experience are of course much more complicated, but if one had to describe what it is like to experience emotions, the lowest common denominator in all emotions would be that there's pleasure or pain involved.

Accepting emotions intentionality and combining it with the Aristotelian notion of the involvement of pleasure or pain,[3] we come to a descriptive definition of emotions as lived experiences: they are intentional states of mind experienced as either enjoyable or discomforting. If one takes enjoyment and discomfort as components of the emotion and as resembling emotion themselves, the definition appears as a petitio principii that doesn't solve any problems but instead leads to further problems. But like Solomon (2004) sharply remarks: "Emotion is not an assemblage." To say that pleasure

---

[3] This pairing of passions and intentionality may not be as bad match as one could think, as according to Solomon (2004) Aristotle acknowledged that descriptions of emotions should primarily focus on what the emotions are about.

and pain are involved in emotion, is not to say that emotions could be dissected into pieces such as an intentional component and an affective component.

Consider the difference between thinking about one's cat and thinking about one's cat with pleasure, where thinking implies that a certain sense about one's cat is involved in the act. In the light of the definition of emotion used in this paper, the latter is an emotion while the former is not. Endorsing the stand that the emotion was built of the two components, "about one's cat" and "with pleasure", would lead to concluding that pleasure and pain are primitive non-intentional feelings. That would correspond to what Goldie (2002) has called the "add-on theory" of emotions, which is problematic, because, according to Goldie (2002, 242) the emotional feelings and the world-directedness of an emotion are inextricably intertwined. For example the enjoyment or discomfort with which an emotion is experienced are qualities of the experience. The origins of these qualities as "ways of thinking" involved could be traced to reside somewhere along the line of the meaning-making process, or noesis, if you will, of the emotional experience, but taking on that kind of project is not relevant here.

This framing unfortunately rules out on one hand the emotional experiences or states that are truly undirected, like the grumpiness discussed earlier and on the other hand the bodily experiences that have the quality of being enjoyable or discomforting and have a particular object, but do not involve meanings per se. (Such as aching of one's toe.) If one wanted to analyse them in relation to intentional emotions, they could be understood as "matter" which influences the ways of thinking that lead to emotions. In this context questions related to those kinds of experiences remain unanswered. But understanding emotions as intentional and involving either enjoyment or discomfort allows us to look at emotions in play from the viewpoints of both qualities of the experience and the object about which a sense is involved in the emotion. But before doing so, we have to define is meant with "in play."

Magic circle as a way of being in the world

A rhetorical question and its answer follow: why in the topic of this paper the wording is "emotions in play" instead of something with "emotions" and "games"? The aim is not to focus on all forms of play and to include computer games only as a subset. Instead, firstly the wording suggests of an attempt to move away from the idea that emotions are consequential to something in the games and secondly to encourage the reader to adapt a mindset in which the game is an element among other elements affecting the players experience and thus may not be held solely responsible for its player's emotions. This is not to say that the contents of games and actions based on them cannot elicit emotions as of course they can, but also in ways not that cannot be controlled by the game designers.

Focusing on "emotions in play" is an act of defining boundaries. The topic rules out the emotions that are involved in for example the experiences of washing the dishes or in making a phone call to one's friend, if these activities are not involved in playing. By emotions in play I mean emotions which are intentionally about something in play. To define what does "in play" mean in "emotions in play", I will start from the concept of magic circle, into which I will take a closer look in the following paragraphs. This is an attempt to look at how something which is already defined as playing or player's experience can extend and have implications outside the actual game. The following paragraphs explore to which extent and with which modifications the ideas that have been

used to frame the activity of playing from an outside observer's point of view can be used to frame the activity from an experiential perspective.

The activity of playing is often understood as taking place inside boundaries. Magic circle, a term coined by Johan Huizinga (2000, 10), is often used to describe these boundaries. To Huizinga, a magic circle was only one of the many possible playgrounds alongside an arena, tennis-court etc. Salen & Zimmerman (2005, 95) adopt magic circle to mean "a special place in time and space created by a game". According to them, by circumscribing a space, magic circle encloses and separates it from the real world. These activities result momentary worlds which reside inside our ordinary world (Huizinga 2000, 10). Huizinga (2000, 19) also writes regarding play, that "[a] closed space is marked out for it, either materially or ideally, hedged off from the everyday surroundings." It is important to note that Huizinga speaks about "marking out" and "hedging off", not about creating or fabricating. While this may seem like plain wordplay, the difference between fencing and creating an area has its consequences. The differences in notions here are rather fine-grained, and it seems that no sensible reading of Huizinga can claim to be more righteous than others. But it is important to note that due to the Dutch word "spel" meaning both game and play (Copier 2005, 5-6), Huizinga makes no difference between play and game as that which creates the space or the boundaries.

In the view of Salen & Zimmerman (2005, 98), the rules and meanings applying inside the magic circle seem to be created for the purpose of playing: "The magic circle can define a powerful space, investing its authority in the actions of players and creating new and complex meanings that are only possible in the space of play", they state. It is hard if not impossible to disagree with Salen & Zimmerman, as they speak of new and complex meanings involved in the magic circle. But instead of speaking of created worlds with created meanings, I suggest that one should look at also how the magic circle *extends* over the real world and *assigns* new meanings on existing objects. Imagine a player of for example *World of Warcraft* or *EverQuest* (1999), who keeps switching between the actual game and an online resource site, such as *Allakhazam's Magical Realm* [4], offering maps and other useful information directly applicable to the game. Maybe the player has even installed for example an add-on that incorporates user-created content, such as NPC locations or probable loot items, to the game's interface, particularly to the map. Traditional magic circle as game-created and closed, as a border between real and non-real becomes problematic here. Content created by a group of real fanboys does not become artificial or non-real when it is incorporated in the game. In this example, it was the player who extended the fence incorporate the user-created content.

Copier (2005) finds the conception of magic circle that indicates creation of a special space with its own authority and special meanings and behaviours as problematic. According to Copier (2005, 8) "[i]t suggests we can easily separate play and non-play, in which the play space becomes a magical wonderland." Copier (ibid.) sees a better option in defining space of play as "being constructed in negotiation between player(s) and the producer(s) of the game but also among players themselves." The two views Copier sees as contrasting seem to complement each other. In addition to the "special meanings and behaviours" (ibid., 8) the players have to accept or take on in order to be able to play a game, they are free to construct their own sets of meanings and behaviours, which can be shared with others. This means that those obligatory meanings, such as, "X represents you" and "Y represents the enemy" are not the only ones in play.

---

[4] http://www.allakhazam.com

As much as player has to be ready to accept that the overlapping of two tokens on the board means players one player eating the other, he must accept that if he wants to use a map of the game space from a webpage simultaneously with playing, on some occasions waiting for a webpage to load up can be deadly for the player-controlled character, and, that if he wants to progress, he may not be able to have a snack in the during the game. Apart from these, player may also think that some regions of the game space, items, and avatars are cooler than others. She can also decide that during this particular playing session, she wants to achieve a certain goal.

Basic human needs, such as multiplying, eating and defecating can come to the way of in-game progression. Sometimes the players ignore their basic needs to a certain extent; inside some magic circles eating is not considered as important as inside others. An extreme example would be the unfortunate Chinese power-gamer who died due to neglecting his needs because of excessive playing.[5] The player decides, consciously or unconsciously, which meanings shall pass the checkpoint on the border his magic circle. Huizinga (2000, 21) seems to suggest that the border between play and non-play is not clear-cut; "The play-mood is *labile* in its very nature. At any moment "ordinary life" may reassert its rights[.]" In the case of the Chinese power-gamer, the demand came in a fatal form. A less tragic example would be that one's internet service provider has problems with its network, disrupting one's playing.

Rodriguez (2006) notes that both Huizinga and Caillois agree that the boundaries of the magic circle must always be fixed in advance of the start of play. In MMOs, the process of demarcating the magic circle may in practice mean the interpretation of legal agreements such as the end user license or the terms of use agreement, which that is a task in which the company behind the game usually has a slight advantage. A player called Infernix[6] writes about his own experience of getting thrown out from *World of Warcraft* because he was running the game client on Linux within a WINE environment and using an automated keyboard, whose manufacturer, Logitech, advertises it as useful for WoW players who want to automate such things as casting spells.[7] This combination is not explicitly mentioned in the terms of use agreement, but the behaviour of Infernix was interpreted as violation of that agreement and his account was closed. This is an extreme example of what happens when different conceptions about the magic circle collide and suggests not only that there are certain limits on how one can define one's own borders of play, but also that the demarcation may be an ongoing process which is not necessarily settled before all involved parties set out to play. This does not refer only to disputes on what is in technical sense cheating and what is not, but also to disputes on the sense of acceptable or good behaviour. The latter topic of dispute is something that is most likely discussed also on a smaller scale, for example on the online discussion boards of player communities whose members share certain sets of values or attitudes.

The usefulness of magic circle in game studies has been contested most recently by Pargman & Jakobsson (2006), who have studied hard-core gamers and found out that they had various motivations for playing and their playing was described as "a routinized practice, firmly integrated in their everyday lives." (ibid., 19) According to Pargman & Jakobsson, (ibid., 19) the playing behaviour of the hard-core gamers is not anything magical, as they "habitually play games without entering into anything even remotely corresponding to a magic circle." This kind of triviality with which Pargman & Jakobsson suggest the power gamers to play deserves more attention. Pargman &

---

[5] http://tinyurl.com/d7p6m (http://www.vnunet.com/vnunet/news/2145633/world-warcraft-gamers-stage)
[6] http://tinyurl.com/njjp2 (http://games.slashdot.org/games/06/03/15/1334241.shtml), http://infernix.net/wowban/
[7] http://tinyurl.com/86ljs
(http://www.logitech.com/index.cfm/products/details/US/EN,CRID=2166,CONTENTID=10717)

Jakobsson seem to suggest that there is a difference in the ways of relating to the game content between these power gamers and those gamers, who enter into some kind of magic circle. Despite taking on this different attitude, they are able to keep playing. It is important to note that taking on this mundane attitude does not free them from having to accept the obligatory meanings of the game. By obligatory meanings I refer to those which one cannot ignore without decreasing one's possibilities to act inside the game. On top of the obligatory meanings, they have developed their own set of meanings, which Pargman & Jakobsson describe as "mundane". If entering into the magic circle is characterised by having to accept such meanings, or the "special meanings and behaviours" (compare: Copier 2005, 8) the game provides, the power gamers mentioned by Pargman & Jakobsson surely enter into a magic circle.

Suggesting a subjective view of the magic circle is not the same as to suggest that there is no homogeneity inside the magic circles or that their contents remain inaccessible due to their subjectivity. Rodriguez (2006) notes that in player's experience, as a primary topic of Homo Ludens, "the word "experience" does not refer to the inner states of an isolated ego", and that "[t]he player's experience essentially unfolds within a structured situation." According to Rodriguez, the structure on which the activity of play builds and which thus to some extent defines the lived quality of the experience, can be tight or loose or anything in between, but it is present in every playing experience. Rodriguez also states that "[d]ifferent types of play can be distinguished from one another via the structures that underpin them."

The acceptance of the existence of these structures as something delineating a subjective experience, does not force one to accept that they all are identical to all players of the same game or to one player's each separate playing of one game. I suggest that apart from accepting the structures imposed by the game, the players participate in creating and shaping these structures. By a common agreement, a group of players may decide to to use real money instead of poker chips while playing *Texas Hold'em* at home. Similarly, a player who plays *World of Warcraft* only to sell the high-level character on eBay plays the game differently than someone who is playing just for kicks. Although the structures that make up the games *Texas Hold'em* and *World of Warcraft* are very different in many respects, in these cases the structures imposed on them by players may make them appear in the lived experience as surprisingly similar. But again, this is not to say that there are no structures common to all players or that the concept of playing as an activity that structures experiences would be in any way invalid.

Let us return to the statement that "emotions in play" means emotions that are in an intentional sense *about* something in play. In my view the area of interest, the "in play", is not magic circle as something resembling a temporal and spatial enclosure, but a circle only in a metaphorical sense, a mental construct, an attitude or "way of being in the world" which ties together things that would not necessarily otherwise belong together. If, for the purpose of defining the area of interest, magic circle was understood in its "traditional sense", as something created by the activity of playing in accordance to what is set forth by the game, we would possibly rule out certain emotions, for example those that are not about the game itself. Instead of trying to define the borders of the player's experience from outside, we should seek to accept the experience as it is.

Real qualities of emotions in play

If we acknowledge that the focus is on an experience already lived as an emotional experience, we could not, without causing the whole argument to dismantle, question the reality or genuineness of

any emotion in play, in the sense that all they all are "sincerely and honestly felt or experienced"[8]. However, that should not prevent us from asking if they had "the reputed or apparent qualities or character"[9] and thus corresponded to some conception of a real or genuine emotional experience. This analysis can be facilitated by having a description of the qualities that make an emotion a genuine emotion. The experiences could be then "metered" in relation to the description based on the qualities or character manifested in them. This analysis would tell us something of the emotions' "quality of being real", but only in the light of the chosen criteria; a psychophysiologist would presumably have a different criteria than a behaviourist. The following paragraph will demonstrate such analysis with criteria derived from Sartre's (2004, 49) tratise on false emotion. These criteria overlap and complement each other and separating them does not do good, but in this case it necessary for analysis. Naturally, it should be noted that with a different criteria this investigation would be something completely different.

To make a comparison possible, two emotional experiences are needed. First is the anger that made Qui Chengwei to stab Zhu Caoyuan fatally and resulted him a suspended death sentence. What makes Qui's anger an emotion in play are the reasons behind Qui's act. Both Qui and Zhu were MMO players. Qui had borrowed Zhu a sword worth of ~725€ in real money, which Zhu sold at an online auction. Understandably Qui got upset.[10] Another, less dramatic experience is the anger I felt while playing *Civilization IV* (2005) in a single-player mode when I found out that one of my provincial cities was stolen by the rival civilization controlled by the AI.

Sartre's first criterion is, that in genuine emotions, the emotional behaviour is sustained by the situation. Maybe Qui's anger was triggered by something in Zhu's behaviour or appearance just a few seconds before the act, or maybe he had planned the act beforehand and if Zhu begged for mercy, it only enforced Qui's anger. Thus, Qui's emotion was most probably supported by the situation. As a second criterion, Sartre mentions the requirement to for a genuine emotion to be accompanied by genuine belief. We can make only guesses here; maybe Qui believed that Zhu deserved stabbing, or maybe he was in a state of mental disturbance. If we assume that Qui could not help being carried away by his emotions while he committed the horrible act, his emotion fulfils Sartre's third criterion as well; it was not a voluntary emotion. Fourth criterion, the involvement of physical phenomena, goes hand in hand with the third one. It's not hard to imagine Qui's hands still shaking long after the act no matter what he did to stop them doing so.

My hands were not shaking while playing *Civilization IV*, although I'm sure there was something happening inside my body, a slight increase in the level of adrenaline for example, that could have been measured with a scientific instrument. This is the only criterion which can be applied without any explanations. To be able to say that my emotion was sustained by the situation requires us first to agree the situation we are talking about is the situation in the game, not the situation of me sitting by a table and using a piece of technology. Having defined magic circle as something assigning meanings on objects, and some of these meanings being more obligatory than others we can accept that we are talking about the situation in the game, which sustained my emotion. The same applies regarding the beliefs supporting my emotion. If I denied the meanings that relate to a city getting stolen, I could not play and my experience would cease to be a playing experience. But as we're

---

[8] http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/genuine
[9] http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/genuine
[10] http://tinyurl.com/2cd399
(http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/games/archives/2005/06/09/chinese_gamer_sentenced_to_life_for_stabbing_a_player_who _stole_his_virtual_sword.html)

speaking of a player's experience, we assume that I genuinely believed that losing a city was an event worth of an emotion. In the sense that I was not forced to play *Civilization IV*, my emotion was voluntary. But if the city which the rival civilization conquered was not a provincial town but my capital metropolis, I can imagine having an emotion that would not go away at my own will. But even in that case, I might have been able to suppress my feelings of anger toward the AI by thinking that "it's only a game, and actually, don't I feel a bit tired of playing already?"

The resolution with Sartre's criteria does not get very high. For a more detailed analysis one could constitute individual criteria for individual emotions. Those could be based on phenomenologies of individual emotions, such as Aristotle's conception of anger as "the appetite for returning pain for pain" (Aristotle 350BCEb 1:1), or Descarte's "love is the desire to be with the beloved object" as quoted by Solomon (2004). But even with the low resolution, it seems that in the light of Sartre's criteria Qui's emotion had more of the apparent qualities an emotion is supposed to have and thus was a more genuine emotion than mine. At this point it is important to note that the comparison of the two examples is possible only if we don't take into account the player's possibility to deny the meanings provided by the game. But for a moment, let us assume that the player does not do so.

Playing, in general, is considered as fun and often there are unpleasant emotions such as fear and anger involved. In the gloomy canals under City 17 of the game *Half-Life 2*, one may suddenly encounter a barnacle, a monster which quickly drops itself from the ceiling above Gordon Freeman and attempts to eat him. The experience of having close encounters with a barnacle can be very traumatic, especially if one was not expecting to meet one. If my anger toward the barnacle was as genuine as Qui's, would playing be enjoyable any more? As a solution we might consider that these situations involve two different emotions, that one's ability to enjoy the situation in *Half-Life 2* indicates that the emotion is actually not anger, but some emotion that differs from anger in terms of its phenomenology. That difference would be so radical that it allowed the emotion to be experienced as pleasurable. The emotion would be real as experienced, but judged based on its phenomenological qualities it would be something else than anger. This would mean that existing conceptions about how emotions work would need revising before being used to analyse emotions in play.

Another possible solution would involve turning to Apter (1991, 16-18), who explains enjoyable negative emotions with the idea of the subject being in a paratelic state. While in paratelic state, "any form of highly felt emotion", also the seemingly unpleasant emotions such as anger, disgust and horror, "will be pleasant[.]" Apter calls this positive form of unpleasant emotions "parapathic emotions". Instead of suggesting that parapathic emotions are phenomenologically different, we could suggest that in a situation where a player enjoyed parapathic anger, the mechanisms of intentionality would remain identical to non-parapathic anger: there would be senses of both slight and vengeance involved, but the quality of being experienced as either enjoyable or discomforting would be inverted. Thus the "quality of being real" of also parapathic emotions could be metered by using criteria based on phenomenologies of individual emotions if the inverted scale of pleasurable-discomforting was taken into account. The solution involving parapathic emotions that are phenomenologically similar to non-parapathic emotions seems simpler than suggesting a difference in the ways of thinking involved. Also lived experience supports this solution: the games seem to pull the same strings as real life does by presenting a slight and offering possibilities for vengeance, and the situations involving shock and anger in games, such as encountering a barnacle, bear a great resemblance to those situations with same emotions experienced outside the magic circle.

While it may seem rather unproblematic, using Apter's theory to understand player's experience has its problems. Not unlike many interpretations of Huizinga's magic circle, Apter speaks of player being inside a certain construct that protects her from the real-world problems. The cover provided by the protective frame is a prerequisite for being in the paratelic state and consequently also for the ability to enjoy negative emotions in their parapathic forms. The particular detail that causes problems is that the protective frame is, according to Apter (ibid. 17-21), supported by a fictional context. Games have no clear border between real and fictional on which the player could set up the protective frame. The physical injuries such as tennis elbows evoked by *Wii Sports* (2006) or inflamed wounds cut by *PainStation* (2001) are only the extremes, but they demonstrate that the player is not safe.

The idea about fictional context, which seems confusing from the perspective of contemporary game studies, is understandable as the union of playing and storytelling can be seen as a new and rather marginal phenomenon on the entire field of human play or "being playful", which are Apter's primary areas of interest. In Apter's (ibid., 15) view, "the protective frame comes and goes in our experience" and the subject is constantly reversing between the two states, paratelic and telic, playful and non-playful. In this light, that I resented while playing Civilization IV, indicates that I was not in paratelic state, but in telic state and thus was being non-playful while playing. Although this is somewhat reasonable and lucid, it seems problematic. Before applying Apter's theory on emotions in play, the problem with fictional context as responsible of the protective frame would need to be solved, which is not the task here.

Given that the problems could be solved, we could state that if an emotion is considered to be a real or genuine when it has all the apparent qualities described by a phenomenology of that particular emotion, enjoyable negative emotions are genuine emotions, despite the inverted quality. But like stated earlier, it seems problematic to decide against which reality we should measure emotions with criteria such as Sartre's; the one of the game, which exists by an agreement between the player(s) and the game and in which the specially assigned meanings apply, or, the reality which exists independently of any agreements. An implication of this dilemma is a question, for example, whether or not a belief involved in an emotion is genuine if it can be denied at will? To evade the problem, or more properly, to turn the problem into an advantage, I suggest the realities of emotions in play to be approached by very possibility of denial.

Emotions about the deniable and the undeniable

Let us be reminded that Solomon (2006, 301) said that "an emotional experience is primarily an experience of the object of emotion from the peculiar perspective of that emotion." Apart from understanding reality as denoting a certain quality which emotions in play may or may not have, we could look at it as a totality in which reside events and objects which have the quality of being real. The concept "virtual reality" suggests that there can be other kinds of totalities as well, and the events and objects residing in these totalities have qualities other than the one of being real.
But as the baseline for the analysis in this paper is the lived experience, we should not be interested in the qualities events and objects have themselves independently from the experience. Instead, the analysis should concern with the objects only to the extent that the experience is concerned with their meanings. Some objects seem to bear meanings that are crucial for the experience; others are in that regard but not necessarily in any other regard less important. The last part of this paper is an attempt to point out, from the viewpoint of the lived experience, two distinct totalities of meanings that are involved emotions in play.

By making the player to accept certain meanings in order to play, games seem to contribute certain emotions in certain situations. When playing *Turbo Outrun* (1989), I have to accept that making it to the next checkpoint before the time runs out is ultimately necessary. If was playing *Grand Theft Auto III* (2002) and did not accept the limitations of the physical space represented in the game or the importance of for example getting out from the car when it catches fire, I wouldn't be very well off in the game. The obligatory meanings imposed by the game control my behaviour inside the game as much as laws of physics control my behaviour in the real world. One might be tempted to understand these obligatory meanings as defining the totality against which the emotions' realness or genuineness could be measured with criteria such as Sartre's.

That kind of understanding would allow us to conclude that the emotions enforced by the obligatory meanings, such as the winner's joy, is more real and genuine than loser's joy, as the former supported by the situation and that the game provides reasonable grounds for beliefs backing up the emotion, and so on. But it is important to note that the necessity of the obligatory meanings is defined in relation to possibilities to play, not in relation to the possibilities to experience play. The meanings involved in emotions in play are not necessarily the meanings whose acceptance is required in order to facilitate playing**.** It is due to this difference that there is a certain space for denial and disbelief among the meanings inside the magic circle. Denial and disbelief are understood as both meaning the same activity, the former being the ultimate form of the latter. One can think of this space as a space of possibilities, as well; the meanings that can be denied can as well be replaced. Thus, we might find it appealing to call it a negotiable space. But as denial is the form of negotiation that in practice demarcates this space, it seems more logical to call it the space for denial and disbelief.

While playing *Turbo Outrun*, I am free to believe that the woman sitting next to the driver is not a woman at all but an inflatable doll put there to make it look like I was allowed to drive in the carpool lane. I am also free to strip the unnecessary meanings and refer to trees as obstacles. Given the flimsy nature of the fictional universe of *Turbo Outrun*, I do not tend to think about the woman sitting next to the driver as somebody to whom I would need to show off, for example. Thus, stripping the unnecessary meanings would not do much harm for my emotions. The ultimate form of denial exists even in experiences with abstract games which otherwise leave little room for denial and disbelief; when playing a single-player game, the player is free to stop playing at any given moment. In the context of single-player games is rather trivial, but when other players come along, things get more interesting.

In *World of Warcraft*, there is a tram connection between the cities of Ironforge and Stormwind. It is possible to miss the tram by a second or two and to notice that the same thing happened to a fellow player as well. If such thing happened in real world, somewhere else than in Finland, it would not, according to my knowledge, be uncommon to share the nuisance with the stranger, possibly by commonly agreeing it out loud that the next tram will come after few minutes. If one did this in Finland, the stranger might consider it as an invasion of one's privacy and utter something incomprehensible as a response. But if one gets no reply at all, an impolite reply or even an insulting reply at the tram stop in Stormwind, it is probably not due to a breach of the sphere of privacy. Instead, one may be witnessing an overlap of two different spaces for denial and disbelief. Although such impoliteness may irritate the one who tried to begin the conversation, denying the fact that the tram between Stormwind and Ironforge is a means of public transport shared with other

players, or even to some extent, that the other players exist, fits well in the space of denial and disbelief allowed by *World of Warcraft*.

The concept of the space of denial and disbelief provides us a way to distinguish between two kinds of emotions in play based on their objects. Emotions can be about objects or events that reside either inside or outside the space for denial and disbelief. My resentment toward the AI behind the rival civilization in *Civilization IV* was an emotion involving a meaning outside the space for denial and disbelief. If I did not have accepted the obligatory meanings set forth by the game, even because of not knowing or understanding how to play the game, I would not have resented. If, instead of resentment, I felt sorry for the citizens who will have to face the rule of the occupation forces, the emotion would have involved a meaning inside the space for denial and disbelief.

Consider a player of *World of Warcraft* casting a Frost Nova spell, which sends a circular wave of deadly frost around the player's avatar. This wave of frost will cause a low-level monster, say, a fire beetle, inside the spell range to die instantly, while this was not the player's intent. If the player is on a level high enough, she will get no experience points from killing a fire beetle and she can go on without even noticing that the tiny fire beetle's journey had come to an end. But one cannot go on without, for example, noticing the consequences of making a typing mistake and accidentally dropping one zero when setting the minimum selling price for an expensive item to be sold at the in-game auction house. The emotion in the former example, the compassion for the fire beetle, involved a meaning residing inside the space for denial and disbelief. The emotion in the latter example, feeling like an idiot due to selling the item too cheaply, involved a meaning residing outside the space for denial and disbelief. Due to this space being defined with the help of meanings shared by all players, we can fairly assume that emotions which are about meanings outside the space for denial and disbelief are the ones which can be shared with others without any explanations. For some this may be an indication of their realness.

It seems that understanding reality as denoting a totality instead of a quality offers possibilities for detailed analysis of intentional emotions in play from the viewpoints of their objects. The space of denial and disbelief as a negotiable space, or its nature as a space of possibilities are topics that would sustain a much more detailed analysis. That would involve looking at, for example, the alternate uses of games and would be rather interesting, but do not unfortunately fit here. Even in its current form, the analysis presented here manages to demonstrate that inside the subjective magic circle, there are at least two totalities of meanings that are involved in emotions in play; the undeniable and the deniable.

References

Links checked 17.1.2006

Apter, M. (1991) A Structural-Phenomenology of Play. In M.J. Apter & J.H. Kerr (eds.): Adult Play. A Reversal Theory Approach. Amsterdam/Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger B.V. 13-30

Aristotle (350BCEa) *Nicomachean Ethics.* <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>

Aristotle (350BCEb) *On the Soul.* <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.html>

Aristoteles (1989) *Nikomakhoksen etiikka* (Nichomachean Ethics). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Brentano, F. (1973) *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Copier, M. (2005) Connecting Worlds. Fantasy Role-Playing Games, Ritual Acts and the Magic Circle. In *Digital Games Research Conference 2005, Changing Views: Worlds in Play, June 16-20, 2005, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.*

Goldie, P. (2002). Emotions, feelings and intentionality. *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 1(1) 235-254

Huizinga, J. (2000) Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture. London: Routledge.

McIntyre, R. & Smith, D.W. (1989) Theory of Intentionality. In J.N. Mohanty & W.R. McKenna (eds.): *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook.* Washington D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology & University Press of America. 147-179

Pargman, D. & Jakobsson, H. (2006) The magic is gone: a critical examination of the gaming situation. In M. Santorineos (ed.): *medi@terra Art + Technology Festival 2006 "Gaming Realities: A challenge for digital culture".* Athens: Fournos Centre for the Digital Culture. 15-22

Peralta, E. (2006) In Second Life, the world is virtual. But the emotions are real. *Houston Chronicle* 27.5.2006. <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ent/3899538.html>

Pratchett, R. (2006) Games that make you cry. BBC Collective. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/collective/A14134097>

Reid, E.M. (1994) Cultural Formations in Text-Based Virtual Realities. Master's thesis. Cultural Studies Program, Department of English. University of Melbourne <http://www.aluluei.com/cult-form.htm>

Rodriguez, H. (2006) The Playful and the Serious: An approximation to Huizinga's Homo Ludens. *Game Studies* 6:6. <http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/rodriges>

Sajama, S. (1996) Tunteiden intentionaalisuus (Intentionality of emotions) In I. Niiniluoto & J. Räikkä (eds.): *Tunteet* (Emotions). Helsinki UP. 258-267

Salen K. & Zimmerman, E. (2005) *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals.* Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press.

Sartre, J-P. (2004). *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. London and New York: Routledge.

Solomon, R.C. (2004). Emotions in Phenomenology and Existentialism For Bert Dreyfus, Mark Wrathall. Manuscript. <http://www.csun.edu/~philos33/EmotionsPhenomenology.pdf>

Solomon, R.C. (2006). Emotions in Phenomenology and Existentialism. In H.L. Dreyfus & M.A. Wrathall (eds.): *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 291-309

Games

Blizzard Entertainment (2004) *World of Warcraft* (PC)

Valve Corporation (2004) *Half-Life 2* (PC)

Sony Online Entertainment (1999) *EverQuest* (PC)

Firaxis Games (2005) *Civilization IV*. 2K Games. (PC)

Nintendo (2006) *Wii Sports* (Nintendo Wii)

Reiff, T. & Morawe, V. (2001) *PainStation* (Custom hardware environment)

SEGA Enterprises Ltd. (1989) *Turbo Outrun*. US Gold. (Amiga)

Rockstar North (2002) *Grand Theft Auto III*. Rockstar Games (PC)