

Experiencing the Body as Play

In their article “Experiencing the Body as Play”, Mueller and al. discuss the possible improvements of the gaming industry by suggesting the use of two perceptions of the human body based on the German terms Körper and Leib in the process of game design. It is clear that incorporating the so called Leib in game design can lead to increasingly interesting gaming experiences, however the authors neglected the importance of social arguments in the approach of their project. There is indeed positive and one negative repercussions that game designer should also consider as they aim for greater user/gaming bodily experience: laziness / health, accessibility, human connections.

The digital world and the rise of technologies are already invading our everyday life so much that some simple human tasks are not necessary anymore, creating a gap between us and our physical world, as well as a growing form of laziness in our society. However, integrating the Leib in everyday life activities could maybe help prevent this, since there is often a lack of emotional support or motivation in physical activity. In their example with the Nike+, they ultimately suggest that the accessory could evolve into some kind of device physically helping the user to correct their movements and then ask an “emotional” feedback on the correction. For people who do not have access to personal trainers or gyms, this could be a game changer. Indeed, we can choose to view this improvement in technology as a way to improve health, and game designer should consider the opportunity to implement this in more similar concepts, through games. I can imagine a kind of updated version of the Nintendo Ring Fit Adventure game¹, in which the Leib would be implemented and help the player be conscious of their body in the space or add limitations to increase the difficulty of the gameplay.

While designing bodily experience, the designers should keep in mind human bonding and relationship. A current disadvantage of video games is that it often implies using a device, connected to a screen, creating a distance between people. When

¹ “Ring Fit Adventure,” Nintendo, 2019, accessed on December 3rd 2019, <https://www.nintendo.com/games/detail/ring-fit-adventure-switch/>.

considering the Leib, and the perceptions and emotions in the gameplay, it could be a considerable improvement to think about games that actually physically link the players, much like the example of Balance Ninja in which the physical movement of one player influences that of the other. In relation to the previous paragraph, human relations are necessary to good health. “Social relationships, it seems, may also help our bodies help themselves”, by reducing stress when in presence of someone we care about, for example, or reinforcing our immune system². This kind of gaming experience could help to bring people together, away from their screens and improve social interaction and relationships.

The next subject matter is the one of accessibility. In this kind of situation, it could be viewed both as positive and negative. In the same way the authors suggested, research focusing on the integration of the Körper and Leib perspectives could bring awareness as to include any types of bodies into the game. However, realistically, experiencing the body as play would be considerably less accessible to people with disabilities. The authors mention how the use of body limitations can “facilitate an intriguing experience of the Leib”, however, such limitations might be impossible to experience for some people. On the other hand, much like VR right now, experiencing the body as play has the potential to “help learners (or players in our case) with disabilities expand their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in ways that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise”³ and even go further, if used efficiently and stimulating the right senses. The great quality of implementing the perspectives of the Körper and Leib is the possibility to use all the senses in our body and not only (or mainly) the sight, much like current video games.

To conclude, the Körper and Leib are two concepts that can not only improve gameplay by experiencing the body as play, but also improve general social and personal conditions, by helping people take care of themselves in a deeper, more fun way, improve social connections and take people with disabilities into consideration, among others. It would be interesting to see to what extent the limitations to the body could evolve, in the goal of creating a richer Leib experience.

²Laura Blue, “Recipe for Longevity: No Smoking, Lots of Friends,” TIME, accessed on december 3rd 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2006938,00.html>.

³ Sam Chandrashekar, “GAAD: How Virtual Reality Can Transform the Way People with Disabilities Learn,” D2L, accessed on december 3rd 2019, <https://www.d2l.com/corporate/blog/gaad-virtual-reality-people-disabilities-learn/>.

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