

We need to focus on rules (handout)

A reflection paper on *rules agency*, submitted to the 15th International Conference on Game and Entertainment Technologies (Lisbon, 2022).

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Rules agency

Full rules agency

Rules agency includes:

- learning rules and / or teaching them
- implementing rules
- enforcing rules
- changing rules and / or creating them

Reduced rules agency

In digital games, rules agency is usually very restricted:

- players do not learn the rules, they just learn to play
- the digital device implements the game rules
- the digital device also enforces the game rules
- players may rarely change rules

The fundamental rules agency

The will to play: the agency to decide whether to play, or not to play.

It may not be removed from a game, both because it lies outside the game, and because it creates the game itself.

Crucially, this is the same agency that several philosophers have identified as the foundation of all power structures -- Étienne de la Boétie, David Hume, and Michel Foucault.

The relevance of rules agency

Deciding to play a game is deciding to create it anew. Before this, there is only the potential for a game.

When someone decides to play a game, by this very act she creates its rules, and also subjects herself to them -- thus, exercising her self-restraint.

As identified by Norbert Elias, self-restraint is an essential element of the civilizing process.

Jean Piaget pointed out that learning to deal with game rules is an essential element in the moral development of children.

References

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