

Videogames between ethics and politics

Rosy Nardone

Università degli Studi “G. d’Annunzio” di Chieti - Pescara

Abstract

I videogiochi sono un media espressivo e persuasivo; rappresentano come funzionano i sistemi reali e immaginari, e invitano i giocatori ad interagire con questi sistemi e a crearsi dei giudizi su di essi, richiedendo una riflessione pedagogica, mirando a specifiche giustapposizioni e complessità. In qualche modo ci costringono a rivedere i paradigmi semantici dell’etica e della politica, in quanto ci conducono in scenari di “realtà aumentata”, caratterizzati da una temporalità giocata, in costante cambiamento, passando da una dimensione visionaria sincronica, fino ad una temporalità che va a ritroso, recuperando ricordi che spesso non sono mai appartenuti prima d’ora alla persona/videogiocatore.

Videogames are an expressive medium, and a persuasive medium; they represent how real and imagined systems work, and they invite players to interact with those systems and form judgments about them, requiring a pedagogic reflection, aiming at specific juxtapositions and complexity. They force us to review the semantic paradigms of ethics and politics, as they lead us into scenarios of increased reality, characterised by played temporality, constantly changing, passing from a synchronic visionary dimension, even to a temporality that goes backwards, recovering memories that have often never belonged to the person/videogamer beforehand.

Parole chiave: Videogiochi, prospettiva educativa, cittadinanza digitale, etica, politica

Keywords: Videogames, educational approach, digital citizenship, ethics, politics

Videogame as a frame between the real and imaginary universe

“Reality cannot be read in a certain manner. Ideas and theories do not reflect reality, but rather translate it, often insufficiently or wrongly. Our reality is nothing more than our idea of reality. It is therefore important not to be banal realists (adapting to the immediate), nor banal irrealists (free from the ties of reality); it is important to be realists in the overall sense of the word; understanding the uncertainty of the real, knowing that the real includes a yet-invisible possible.”

Edgar Morin

In an historical era such as ours, characterised by the *virtualisation* of the economy, politics and social relations, videogames act as an emblem of the complex weave of technological models, communication processes and social and cultural matrices of the mediatic system. Within the composite world of mass-media, among complexity, differences and false illusions, a new dimension emerges: *my-media*, which through interactivity, hyper-mediality and connectivity, amplifies the possibility of access to communication resources and the so-called *media customisation*. This cultural change affects not only communicative but also economic, social and political paradigms: *media* is customised, leading to the creation of new languages, social interaction and exploration of the world. From the distribution of contents we move to the construction of possibilities of action in a context shared by groups of individuals, involving numerous expressive codes at the same time. If we look back at changes that media such as computers, phones and videogames have undergone, we can see how computers migrated from research centres to the home, where personal computers are now just another medium for personal use. “Videogames are no different, moving from citywide arcades to homebound console systems so that the current interaction of mobile phone gaming is simply part of developmental process” (Wolf et. al., 2015, p. ix).

Like modern “primitive man” we can act in the communication system, leaving our own prints, signs of an active presence in the virtual space of the web, in the metaphor of which we find the mirror of configuration of contemporary urban space. In these new cultural scenarios, computer games play an increasingly emergent and complex role of the ideal merging point between technology, entertainment, literature, cinema, art and mass communication. Videogames differ from other manufactured goods in that they are rare products that simultaneously are electrical, mechanical, and works of art; they aggregate a range of ideas from the field of engineering to literature to psychology, and they provide society with a necessary tool of “play” (Wolf et. al., 2015).

The cultural context they lie in oscillates in various fields that in some aspects appear very distant from each other, bearing witness to their polysemic nature,

Rosy Nardone – *Videogames between ethics and politics*



now a medium, now a tool, now an artefact with linguistic, iconographic and thematic codes, now a product of contemporary culture. As contemporary mass-media *reveals*, "...at this point, videogames reveal all. They set the scene of imaginary worlds with upturned ethics. Defined loyally and explicitly as a game, the realm of the fantastic, they help us to mark the difference between the real and imaginary universe. And help, maybe, to recover a sense of reality" (Ascione, 1999, p. 21).

Thus to paraphrase Savater (1992) who believes that ethics and politics represent two ways of handling life, using freedom following firstly a personal perspective, dealing only with what is best for one's own wellbeing, while the second looks further, to shared wellbeing, in relation to others in a public organisation of things that concern many, computer games and the virtuality dimension they entail can be considered as the contemporary representatives of this ambivalent dialectic, private and public, legitimate and illicit, isolation and participation.

They force us to review the semantic paradigms of ethics and politics, as they lead us into scenarios of *increased* reality, characterised by played temporality, constantly changing, passing from a synchronic *visionary* dimension, even to a temporality that goes backwards, recovering memories that have often never belonged to the person/player beforehand. Most computer games are systems of rules that encourage players to work toward goals in a virtual environment. And many computer games address players by means of a story. There are, then, two fundamental elements to these computer games: systems and worlds. These two elements have to be coherent, creating entertaining gameplay while crafting a game world. The ethics of games as designed objects can be found in the relations between these two elements. (Sicart 2009, p. 22).

The authentic virtual man is he who is "aware that the virtual world, to which he contributes to founding by being in the web, is at the same time a real world" (De Kerckhove 1997, pp. 10-11), and the view offered looks to the potential of the videogame tool, both as the object of learning and as a learning tool, a container of information.

Semantically, the root of "virtual" lies in the Latin *virtualis* which in turn comes from *virtus*, *strength*, *power*. The virtual reality is an entity that exists in power, and responds in some way to a project, an imagined, desired, wanted and constructed reality, produced by individuals and lived by them. It represents a *hyper*-reality more than a *hypo*-reality

"*The medium is the message*" states McLuhan (1967), and we must therefore identify "in which form and to what extent a given medium affects the quality of the sent message, and in which way the specificity of a medium affects the cognitive processes underlying the understanding of the message" (Caronia, Gherardi 1991, p. 7). What is, then, a computer game? In one of the foundational texts of the field, Jesper Juul's *Half-Real*, a game is defined as "a rule-based system with a vari-

able and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.” (Juul 2005, p. 36) And video games would then be “games played using computer power, where the computer upholds the rules of the game and the game is played using a videodisplay.” (Juul 2005, p. viii). Juul defines games as objects that have a level of systemic rules, and it seems to consign to a secondary level of importance the computer game’s fictional level, at least when it comes to understanding what games are. This definition covers the game as a system of rules with which agents interact, paying attention to the emotional attachment of players to games. Rules will be, in Juul’s approach, the “real” element of games, connected to the fictional element, the game world. This distinction means that games can be analyzed as systems, as fictional worlds, as both, and as the ways they interrelate, implying at least four dominant modalities of understanding games. These modalities are crucial for him to understand the ethics of computer games.

Contemporary political and social debate on computer games is too busy condemning them as uncontrollable bringers of violence for the new generations and banning them to avoid foretold disasters, to stop and see that first of all the content consists in the subject represented by the medium, while the message is linked to the set of ideas, prejudices and stereotypes transmitted in the medium in itself, whatever the represented content “Talking of the alienating effects of videogaming or the temptation towards violent behaviour simply because video games often include violent scenes means not having understood the specificity of the videogame as an expressive medium, in the sense attributed by McLuhan. A specificity that makes the videogame medium completely different from cinema.[...] The audiovisual/narrative dimension is only one of the essential components of the videogame. One of many. For many authors, in particular ludologists, on the contrary it is an inessential component, which ends up hiding the videoludic quid *per excellence* which in fact coincides with the interactive and simulative dimension. Authors such as Gonzalo Frasca underline how videogames are microsystems governed by rules. At the heart of the videoludic experience lies the interaction with a system of rules, which in some cases spills over into a realm where they can be questioned, even modified.” (Casolari 2005)

The videoludic simulation lived by a young person, child or adult is governed by a system of rules, often cloudy and invisible to the eyes of the videogamer, but which act as the *frame*, defining precisely how this simulation, however immersive, is not the reality of daily life. This could constitute the “protective net” that safeguards and legitimises the videogamer: I can go beyond, dare in new experiences because simulation is the guarantee that what happens takes place in the interaction of the game. In which territory does this ludic border-crossing fall? Which other territories of meaning must we deal with? In the difficulties present in the

personal history of the player, latent and unspoken? In the indifference of society towards those on the edge, who live on the “outskirts of no centre”? The issue of violence must be defined, given the right weight and not used as an excuse by the press to create alarmism each time a new game is launched.

There is a difference, if the scenes of aggressiveness and violence are represented with extreme graphic detail, above all for young gamers, however it is also true that even though the representations appear realistic, in the realm of the game we often find fictitious elements, multiple lives, unreal objects, never-ending munitions, etc.: as videoludic practice is not itself violent, we need to distinguish between an act of violence and its representation (Thompson, 2002)

The parallel with art can help to understand: Picasso’s “*Guernica*” is a work of art; war and its represented consequences are an act of violence. There is also a clear difference if the violent action is in some way “socialised”, done for its own sake, in environments where it is not requested (e.g. sports events) or if it takes place in contexts in which it is functional and regulated, war action in an historical context.

As Jenkins (2006a) states, the problem with games like “*Grand Auto Theft*” (which incited great ethical debate, because of its explicit sex and urban violence scenes) lies not in the violence of the contents but in the stereotyped representation of violence. Those games discourage the user from questioning the role of violence in the surrounding world. They are little more than galleries that glorify shooting. The best modern games demand that we think about our choices and try to understand how the world could be different if we had made other choices. This is a potent form of ethical education.

According to Jenkins, all forms of narrative media in history have used violence to probe important ethical questions. Those offering a frankly negative and apocalyptic reading of computer games often ignores the fact that the act of playing is often interrupted by the “reality plane” that interferes with the player: a ringing phone, parents coming into the room, a break for lunch, and so on.

Action or violence: where is the attractiveness?

According to It’s in the experience of the game object where we shall find the ethics of the game. That experience is a process of interpretation of the game system, the game situation, and of the very subject of the player, considered from synchronic (while playing the game) and diachronic (as all the games ever played) perspectives. As Sicart argue, “the presence of a player/user who actively engages with the system is crucial for understanding the ethical configuration of the game experience. Players are not passive receivers, and they are not just bots clicking on the button to get their ludic fix. Players are reflective, virtuous beings; they think

Rosy Nardone – *Videogames between ethics and politics*



about their strategies in more ways than just trying to figure out the success criteria and the best ways of achieving these goals. Players act in a game as ethical beings as well as goal-oriented, rational players. There is a responsibility in their actions; they are not passive victims but active moral agents when they play.” (Sicart 2009, pp. 111-112)

There are games and games, as you would choose to watch one film rather than another, but this does not lead to the demonisation of the cinematographic medium. Video gamers are not forced to choose bloodthirsty shooting, war or horror games at all costs. They are chosen because the players want to test themselves, investigate the rules of that particular game (they do not *really* want to kill someone but rather, translated into the ludic language, wish to find the appropriate tools, carry out given actions, unveil and solve clues and reach the target in the shortest time possible: does this maybe mean being violent towards your friends in real life?).

We often forget that the most famous board games, so often played at family parties, are also ludic representations of war or political strategies: *chess*, *draughts*, *Risk*, *Monopoly* (which is fact was forbidden in some places because it was considered to be the metaphor of capitalism). Thinking of the historical-anthropological approach, video games are the modern expression of an ancient skill we carry in our DNA, even “unconsciously” within the evolution of play, traditional rituals, or social and even cultural reference models. Nostalgic attitudes of a past that was better than the present and the future certainly do not help the new generations towards autonomy: their time is now and tomorrow, and the tools they need to live there are the tools of evolution.

It is action, not violence, that attracts videogamers to the screen ...

“None of the videogame victims are human, and none of them really die. They simply disappear in a fading explosion of sound effects and bonuses. [...] Videogames are closer to Willy Coyote than Quentin Tarantino. They are a cartoon parody of violence in the real world.” (Herz 1997, p. 146, 183).

As Ian Bogost has written, when we play video games, “we explore the possibility space its rules afford by manipulating the symbolic systems the game provides. The rules do not merely create the experience of play, they also construct the meaning of the game. That is to say, the gestures, experiences, and interactions a game’s rules allow (and disallow) make up the game’s significance. Video games represent processes in the material world—war, urban planning, sports, and so forth and create new possibility spaces for exploring those topics. That representation is composed of the rules themselves. We encounter the meaning of games by exploring their possibility spaces. And we explore their possibility spaces through play.” (2007, p. 121). And also, being a player and being immersed in a cultural community of players is also an ethical action. The relations with other players,

within the same game experience or in the social instances that surround the game, is a practice of playing a game.

By exploring *Grand Theft Auto* or other similar titles into a classroom or in educational setting, a boy or a girl could have the possibilities to discover and involve learning to think critically about mass media: games literacy has to include asking hard questions of this still emerging medium, questions concerning representations, ideology, and of course, commercial motives. (Hutchison, 2007; Gee, 2008). An ideology underlies each ludic plan, mirroring the thought of its creator¹.

“Understanding the videoludic *text* also means considering the *context* it emerges from, considering the social dynamics it triggers. [...] The videogame is a form of visual ideology, to the extent that [...] *every* videogame explicitly or implicitly transmits political, social and cultural content.” (Bittanti 2005, p. 10)

It is significant that after 9-11, subject matter has changed also in the videogame industry, and enemies are taking more and more the form of Islamic terrorists.

Until the late 1990s, videogames were always characterised by a bipolar concept of geopolitical relations, the USA against China, Iran or Russia, as found in games such as “*Balance of Power*”, “*Red Alert*”, and others. In more recent games, on the other hand, a third faction has risen: “Islamic terrorism”, which makes the old enemies in some way more respectable. In the 2003 strategy game “*Command and Conquer Generals*” the USA and China become “friends”, fighting together against a network close to al Qaeda, which behaves in a “barbaric” manner.

It is easier to capture Osama Bin Laden in the virtuality of the “*Bin Laden Liquors*” videogame than in reality... And the counterparts, those labelled as enemies, are creating videogames that simulate their vision of truth: for example, “*UnderAsh*”, about the Intifada, and its follow-up “*Under Siege*”.

“An entire genre,” states Bittanti (2005, p. 12), “the *first person shooter* (FPS), which appeared after the first Gulf War (1991), realistically simulates the annihilation of the Other.”

In the controversial scenario of *v-ideological* models of the recognised enemy to be beaten, with us as “the good guys”, forms of subversion of these orientations are born, bearing witness to the fact that the videogame culture is not monolithic; “in other words: for every simulation like *America's Army* there is a dissimulated MOD” (2005, p. 13).

From war to peace: an upturning viewpoint in the video ludic models

It is interesting to see how this ludic model creates games that are in contrast to the logic of propaganda and war, upturning the viewpoint described above. These

videogames (many free and downloadable from the web) are created to promote social condemnation, active citizenship, *no global* culture and models of pacifism, which have very complex themes, aesthetics and ideologies, whose producers and designers are independent from the global market rulers, but which aim in their games to develop aspects linked to critical information, the breaking down of uniform thought, provoking critical and aware reflections on modern society.

These are also called *subversive games* – represented in Italy by the **Molleindustria** collective (such as the videogame on McDonald's), or through experiences that lead to artistic production, such as that of Antonio Riello ("*Italiani Brava Gente*") -*newsgaming*- captained by researcher Gonzalo Frasca, in which the critical approach to information is central, "subversive videogames", "persuasive games", "invincible games" which offer a veritable *v-ideology* through the gaming models.

The peculiarity of these computer games is their disruption of *gameplay*, creating a simulative hybrid in which the "standard" model of the binary defeat/victory system is replaced by a more complex system, which involves human relations and implications, in which "the dividing line between *ludus* and *paideia* are not stable but fluid" (Järvinen 2005, p. 45). This computer genre is meeting with more and more success: videogames based on news events. Traditionally, videogames are based on fantasy rather than reality, but these creators are convinced that it may be a highly effective tool for understanding our world better.

"Peace" games have also been created using the systemic model of the rules of war, in which the player takes the role of a conflict solver, simulating non-violent struggles to obtain peace, or the role of a journalist trying to offer a more complete vision of reality.

The increasing use of interactive journalism methods and sources to support an ideology and increased immersivity in the game is seen in so-called **serious games**, a simulation that appears to all effects a game but which is effectively the reproduction of events or processes in the real world, such as "*Global Conflicts: Palestine*"², by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen of the *Center for Computer Games Research* at the IT-University of Copenhagen on the Israeli – Palestine conflict; "*Peace Maker*", again developed to promote the pacific resolution of the Israeli – Palestine conflict; "*Escape from Woomera*", a simulation of the conditions of the refugees in an Australian detention camp; "*Pax Warrior*", in which the gamer plays the part of a U.N. Commander during the Rwanda genocide in an attempt to activate peace processes; "*A force more powerful*", a complex management game that educates towards non violence...

As Salen and Zimmerman (2003, p. 558) state, "resistance is a form of *friction*, a more general notion than that of the general notion of 'resistance' as a form of political opposition. Resistance can sometimes be political but may also take on other forms. When two phenomena come into conflict, the result is friction, resistance."

Rethinking the uses of the videogame also means redesigning the mechanics, the system of rules and models of interactivity, which translates into veritable ideologies.

The challenge for the inhabitants of the *Global Village* is still on: being part of a *videoludic community* may be a choice, or we are all – consciously or otherwise – immersed in “parallel worlds”, in a game of mirrors and simulations between *real reality and hyper-reality* or digital realities? Simulated participation platforms like *Active Worlds*³, *Second Life*⁴, offers of *cyber-tourism*: are these not perhaps a “mirror” function, acting as a bridge over real our daily reality?

They are not only a game...

The videogame is not only a means of expression, but an open, customisable tool, in which content loses all importance, leaving the field free for the different uses individual players make of the videogame. Videogames are more than just another medium of expression, another way of constructing worlds or generating stories, and they are more than just a new source of material for the imagination, even though they are also both of these things. “What’s more, videogames offer us new arenas of action, where we can spend an increasing portion of our daily lives [...]” (Quaranta, 2006, p. 300)

According with Jenkins (2005, p. 313), videogames, are as art, “represent a new lively art, one as those earlier media were for the machine age. They open up new aesthetic experiences and transform the computer screen into a realm of experimentation and innovation that is broadly accessible. And games have been embraced by a public that has otherwise been unimpressed by much of what passes for digital art”.

Here it is worth offering a summary of the *videogame* medium through the metaphors of **mirror**, **bridge** and **boundary** that describe various potentials and functions (Nardone, 2007):

MIRROR function: through simulation, videogames place us before the contradictions of our reality, what happens or could potentially happen in our daily, *globalised* lives. As a mirror, the use of the medium is instrumental, it becomes a device that carries “images of the real”. In educational terms, does this aspect not offer the possibility to work on the responsibilities of each citizen/person, either in micro-situations of daily conflict and in more macro terms of world dynamics in which we are often passive and anesthetised spectators? (examples: *Darfur is dying*, *Façade*, the range of *serious games* such as **12th September**). As a reflecting mirror, it offers us the chance to process awareness of who we are; what type of society we are creating; what are our most common fears; what we are running from and

where we are seeking refuge; what imaginary enemy prototypes we have built; who represents the *alter ego*?

BRIDGE/BOUNDARY function, crossing the threshold of physical/material reality to simulate possible actions in a reality that does not remove but rather add experiences, possibilities, experimentation. It may help us to face a situation we would like to be in, or which we will probably soon choose to be in (e.g.: *Food Force*, *Unicef Games*, *PaceMaker*, *The Sims*, etc): recreative, the medium becomes representative. In this direction, we may choose to become the Palestine leader or the Israeli minister, trying to understand “from closer up” the complex Palestine situation, and what we would do in that situation; we can act as participants in the planning of our own city. We experiment a reality that adds dimension to our reality...

We are in a phase in which the dividing line between representation and life becomes more and more transient, the boundaries between apparent reality and its virtualisation are *con-founded*, becoming increasingly permeable. This does not imply a “loss of reality” but rather the creation of *simulacra*, which create different and sometimes overlapping forms of reality. All citizens act, live in contexts of contemporary life, represented by the metropolis, symbols and scenarios of a *liquid* society (Bauman 2000), increasingly less unequivocal, and increasingly multifaceted and contradictory.

In an ambiguous, specular and overlapping relationship, citizens and videogamers, avatars and characters move in videoludic scenes that trespass into the land of the real, sometimes reproducing the same appearance, sometimes imprecise places and times camouflaged by unacceptable monsters and aliens, offering the metaphor of disorientation and daily fears, or possible strategies and relations to be built. Tangible cities (sometimes *invisible* to most people), complex weaves of *fluid* yet often *opaque* life spaces, built of unmemorable “*Non-Lieux*” (*non-places*) (Augè 1992), which co-exist alongside places filled with memory; cities as a mirror of continuous change. Cities, closed territories, with more and more boundaries that turn into frontiers, requiring increasingly complex keys of access – for only the most skilled players or those who are motivated, as the game “*gets tough*”, coincides with the same life – vice versa *non-city cities*, with head nor tail, no way in nor out, constantly changing: when does the game start for the videogamer? Does it really end at “game over” or when you log out from the on-line world? “*Is there an outside, outside of Penthesilea? Or however far you flee from the city, you simply move from one limbo to another, never managing to get out?*” (Calvino 2002, p. 157).

Cities/life spaces/possible horizons (*virtual urban life*) similar to hypertext, a real communication *medium*, symbolic bringers of meaning of interaction, a process, in which a short-circuit between reality and representation, reality and potential, life and opportunity, comes into play, in the screens that turn they into immense *city-scape*.

Rosy Nardone – *Videogames between ethics and politics*



Contemporary man is a citizen of chaotic, complex life times and spaces, moving in daily labyrinths like a videogamer intent on passing tests, overcoming obstacles, solving riddles, dominating fear and anxiety over not being able to dominate it, not able to create feather and wax wings like Daedalus to escape from the closing path. The ambiguity of representation remains: does the exponential growth of “virtual labyrinths” symbolise the desire for ludic evasion and control over the anxiety of daily life, or at the same time, do the videoludic environments use the labyrinth to represent the metaphor of contemporary and future scenarios?

Real cities are imagining more and more fictitious ones, and real citizens are more and more at ease when passing from one to the other: is the citizen’s identity becoming *blended*? As Herz wonders, are videogames, “on-line games, metaphors of human experience? And if so, where does the metaphor stop?” (Herz 2006)

“The walls of the maze built leave space at the edge of the computer-designed labyrinth. In this way we are catapulted into the world of the modern painted image and allowed to interact with it. The universe of the videogame is a projection of the fairytale into the contemporary world. The rules are set in a maze path that reaches another target, but only our playing skills will allow us to beat monsters and chimera to find our way out of the maze and win the battle.” (Sambo 2005, p. 314)

Videogame cities are often seen from above, with a *top down* vision, recreating a metaphor of the city that represents all of them:

“Behaviour patterns, those are the key to the urban living organism. *Sim City* may be the classic example of a virtual city, but there are many more. The violent urban jungles of the *Grand Theft Auto* series offer a much more grim perspective of metropolitan social interaction. Massively multiplayer online games such as *World of Warcraft* include not just one but several cities and towns, each one with their own economy and features. [...] You do not read simulations: you experiment with them. Experimentation involves taking risks, making mistakes, testing the boundaries of the system. By playing *Sim City*, I do not learn anything about a specific city, but rather I explore the behaviour patterns that make all cities work. The virtual tourists visiting *Sim City* bring back home strange souvenirs. Not postcards, but rather sociological and urban rules. You learn about crime rates and urban planning, where to build schools, about the need for green spaces, taxes and the challenge of creating a network of highways. Sure, these rules are usually incomplete stereotypes, abstractions, simplifications, but still the videogame player as a virtual tourist approaches the subject with an inquisitive, critical attitude. In other words, she learns about the mechanics of the place she just visited, rather than returning back home with yet another cheesy watercolour depicting the New York skyline. Videogames are a new way to recreate reality.” (Frasca, 2005, pp. 80-81)

Real and virtual stop being opposite categories and increasingly become parts of a single continuum, in which we find people, their communication practices and

their acts of social life. Players are more than users, they become *spect-authors*, themselves producers of the game's contents, and the game becomes more and more experience. And if, as always maintained from Huzinga to Callois, the game finds a place in the space and time of the cultural system in which it was produced, our globalised and telematic time can but produce a game that is more than ever "on line", not only from an executive point of view but above all in terms of shared knowledge, containing from the most sophisticated elements to the trash of popular culture.

As Sherry Turkle underlines, "*cultures need to play with their central experiences, replicating them in ritual, ludic, artistic forms*" (Turkle 1984, p. 235).

The evolution of the videogame is already underway: they are rapidly losing their "closed system" nature and their boundaries are expanding, less rigid, and most of them are being configured as open, *open-source* systems, *multiplayer platforms*, played on line, which attract thousands of players from all over the world – or rather from those parts of the world which offer the possibility of access, and the economic and cultural conditions: are we seeing another sub-division of the world? A north and south, with the equator dotted by the pixels of WWW accessibility? Here we could go down a further path of study, that of the *digital divide*, which would lead us into other complex scenarios, of undoubted interest but moving away from our focus of thought here.

Virtual places are taking on a connotation of real life environments, meeting places for videogamers: like the Greek agora, these immaterial places tend to become meeting and knowledge places with a two-fold purpose. If on one hand they constitute the new ludic scenarios in which *homo game* puts himself to the test, experimenting new rules of the game (which themselves become more and more non-rules), on the other hand they represent more and more the extension of the real world, thus moving from apparent alienation from reality to concrete opportunities for both socialisation and the possibility for work for *homo ultrasapiens interconnectus*, or rather:

"the inhabitant of the global village working in the data sphere thanks to artificial prostheses managed by a computer. [...] familiarity is not a question of practice but rather sticking to a precise mental attitude [...]". (Alinovi 2002, p. 41)

Note

¹ It is interesting, for example, the news on the birth of a school for multiracial videogames. The project aims to restore the balance of the videogame image, creating a new generation of black and Hispanic developers. The Urban Video Game Academy aims to restore the balance of the clearly racist vision that emerges from the most common US videogames.

² www.seriousgames.dk/

³ www.activeworlds.com a sandbox platform for creating anything you can think of, inside a universe with hundreds of worlds, millions of objects, used not only for the 3D visualisation of virtual scenarios but also for “multi-user” communication (chat or Voice over IP).

⁴ www.secondlife.com is a virtual world, a persistent 3D space completely created and evolved by its users (*Linden Lab* is the software publisher)

Riferimenti bibliografici

- B AA. VV. (2003), *Il colore dei videogiochi* in DDD, number 6 Apr/Jun Year 2
Active Worlds www.activeworlds.com (ver. 19/06/2017)
- Alinovi, F.(2002), “Serio videoludere”, in Bittanti, M. (edited by) *Per una cultura dei videogames*, Milan: Unicopli (pp. 7-45)
- Ascione, C. (1999), *Videogames. Elogio del tempo sprecato*, Rome: Minimum Fax
- Augé, M. (1992), *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris: Le Seul
- Bauman, Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bogost, I. (2007), “The Rhetoric of Video Games”, in Salen K. (ed.) *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (pp. 117-140)
- Bittanti, M. (2005), “V-ideologia o la macchina della Guerra”, in Bittanti, M. (edited by), *Gli strumenti del videogiocare*, Milan: Costa & Nolan (pp. 9-37)
- Calvino, I. (2002 edition), *Le città invisibili*, Milan: Oscar Mondadori
- Caronia, L.; Gherardi, V. (1991), *La pagina e lo schermo*, Florence: La Nuova Italia
- Casolari, P. 23/11/2005, “Il videogame da mezzo a strumento”, in Videoludica
<http://www.videoludica.com> (ver. 19/06/2017)
- Frasca, G. (2005), *Playing in miniatures garden*, in “CLUSTER_05 On Innovation”
July 2005, digital copy http://ludology.org/articles/CLUSTER_05.pdf (ver. 19/06/2017)
- Gee, J. P. (2008), *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy, revised and updated*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Herz, J. C. (2006) “Prefazione” in Gerosa, M.; Pfeffer, A., *Mondi Virtuali*, Rome: Castelvechi (pp. 7-11)
- Herz, J. C. (1997), *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds*, Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co
- Hutchison D. (2007), *Playing to Learn: Video Games in the Classroom*, Westport: Teacher Ideas Press
- Isbiter, K. (2016), *How games move us. Emotion by design*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

- Järvinen, A. (2005), “Elementi di simulazione nei videogiochi. Sistema, rappresentazione e interfaccia in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*”, in Bittanti, M. (ed.), *Gli strumenti del videogiocare*, Milan: Costa & Nolan (pp. 41-61)
- Juul J. (2005), *Half – Real. Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, The MIT Press, MA
- Jenkins, H.(2005), “Games, the New Lively Art,” in Hartley J. (ed.), *Creative industries*, London: Blackwell Publishing (pp. 312-327)
- Jenkins, H.(2006a) *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: NYU Press
- Jenkins, H. (2006), *Convergence culture. Where old and new media collide*, New York: NYU Press
- McLuhan, M. (1967), *The Medium is the Message*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books
- Morin, E. (1999), *Les Sept savoirs nécessaires à l'éducation du futur*, Paris: UNESCO
- Nardone, R. (2007), *I nuovi scenari educ@tivi del Videogioco*, Bergamo: Ed. Junior
- Pool, S. (2013), *Trigger Happy 2.0: The Art and Politics of Videogames*, ebook
- Quaranta, D. (2006), “Game Aesthetic”, in Bittanti, M., Quaranta, D. (ed.), *Game Scenes. Art in the age of videogame*, Milano: Johan & Levi (pp. 295-306)
- Salen, K. Zimmerman, E. (2003), *Rules of play: Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Sambo, M. M. (2004), *Labirinti, da Crosso ai videogames*, Rome: Castelvecchi
- Savater, F. (1992), *Etica per un figlio*, Rome: Laterza
- Second Life secondlife.com (ver. 19/06/2017)
- Serious Game Interactive www.seriousgames.dk (ver. 19/06/2017)
- Sicart, M (2009), *The Ethics of Computer Games*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Thompson, C. (2002), “Violence and the political life of videogames” in King L. (edited by), *GAME ON. The history and culture of videogame*, New York: Universe Publishing (pp. 22-31)
- Turkle, S. (1984), *The second self: Computers and the Human Spirit*, New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Wardrip-Fruin N., Harringan P. (eds) (2004) *First Person. New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussets, London, England
- Wolf, M. J. P. (edited by) (2015), *Video games around the world*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (p. ix)
- Zullino, P. (Spring 1997), *A chi ha paura rispondo: è un'occasione, fantastica*, interview with De Kerckhove D., in "Teléma" (pp. 8-12)

Rosy Nardone, Ricercatrice in Didattica e Pedagogia speciale (M-PED/03) presso l'Università degli studi "G. D'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara. È membro del CSGE (Centro Studi sul genere e l'Educazione) e del CEMET (Centro di Ricerca su Media, Educazione e Tecnologie) del Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Educazione "Giovanni M. Bertin" dell'Università di Bologna. Tra i suoi ambiti di ricerca: le applicazioni ICT e contesti educativi; videogiochi ed educazione; la prospettiva di genere nell'educazione; media education; l'educazione inclusiva.
Contatto: mariarosaria.nardone@unich.it

Rosy Nardone – *Videogames between ethics and politics*

