

ACTION AND COMMUNICATION IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD OF VIDEO GAMES

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ABSTRACT. The ambition of this paper is to discuss the possible ways of analysing one of the latest media of our times, the video games.

By way of preliminary, we attempt to define the new media element that we call video game, followed by an investigation into the possibilities of narrative/discursive and medial analyses applied to video games.

We deem our article necessary as video games define our present to a great extent, filling in a considerable amount of time in the life of young and middle-aged individuals alike – still, there are very few domestic analyses on the complex narrative structures, rhetorical practices, and intermedial relationships of computer games. News on the extreme ‘overuse of computer games’ take charge of public discourse, reporting – otherwise rightly – on cases featuring computer game users for whom these media served as sources of inspiration for their engagement in violent acts. But, at the same time, we often tend to overlook the fact that this new medium offers excellent new possibilities for ‘taking possession’ of complex virtual worlds, establishing new types of communication media, and creating first-class narratives.

Keywords: computer games, virtual worlds, game theory, new medias, allegory

Defining Computer Games

Defining video games in their strict sense is rendered more difficult first of all by the dispersion of their morphological, technical, narrative, etc. attributes on an extremely vast palette shaped throughout their history.

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We may declare that computer games fit into the postmodern paradigm and we can place them among the new media. As a matter of fact, a video game is a series of phenomenon simulation that draws on the possibilities of the developing digital technology, thus acquiring the potential to assimilate all previous media, integrate them into its processes, and adapt them to its own media in such a way that they continue to be recognizable as well as usable as they are 'per se', that is, as functioning according to their own set of rules and practicabilities. Video games do not realize this by way of modelling, that is, by integrating a – perhaps even readable – newspaper into the virtual world created by them. Such an example would be the fictional *New World Press*, one of the determining media organizations of *Deus Ex Universe*, several 'excerpts' of which can be found scattered about in more or less conspicuous places in the virtual space of the game, assisting the player in understanding the game and fitting together its puzzle-like storyline. We may also mention here the functional TV set (you can turn it on and off as you wish) in *Max Payne 2*, which plays a marginal role in terms of the actual plot, but it provides important pieces of information that confer a fuller meaning to the symbolics and add to the storyline, enhancing the immersive experience.

In our interpretation, technology-centred definitions of the game concept are too vague, as theoretically any electronic device with an interface can be used for entertainment – even a barcode scanner may serve as a gaming device for those gifted with a peculiar sense of humour –,¹ which is why Tavinor & Newman's narrowed down specification² becomes necessary, who consider their *origins* and *intentionality* as core characteristics. Tavinor's viewpoint seems to be the most coherent, who, besides the 'roots' of numerical entertainment software – on which he converges with Newman –, qualifies both sticking to the framework of rules embedded in the code and a *fiction-based use* as necessary constituents of its meaning.

We would just like to add to the aforementioned descriptions that we accept as video games only those interactive programs – built for entertainment purposes, formerly running on electronic and more

¹ See, e.g., the following video on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVxnfLTBhz4>.

² 'X is a videogame if it is an artifact in a visual digital medium, is intended as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of one or both of the following modes of engagement: rule and objective gameplay or interactive fiction' (Tavinor, 2009. 26; Newman, 2004. 11).

recently on digital platforms – that are *world-like*, that is to say – as mentioned above –, they are satisfactory simulations of themselves. Consequently, these are interactive media that create a medium so that, through the intertwining of the player's gestures and the simulated world, certain actions can take place, having the capacity of setting in motion the unified operation of the gamer – connecting via some kind of interface – and the numerical medium. Furthermore, this unity integrates the program user's gestures in such a way that regarding the rules of the game the timelines and spaces existing/arising in the gameplay are qualified as attributes of coherent worlds.

A Discursive and Medial Analysis of Computer Games

We come up against the basic methodological issue as to whether we are mistaken or not when trying to carry out a discursive analysis on the *medial*. Since it would be wrong to state either that the method of conveyance could be restricted to rhetorical movements or that medial operations have exclusively discursive characteristics, we will also include in our 'scientific observations' the category of aesthetics, which offers us a lot wider scope for manoeuvre than discourse analysis focused on conversations/narrations. At the same time, I would like to express that, as far as our topic is concerned, we will not engage in the direct application of the discourse analysis methodology as postulated by Foucault because neither the critical, exclusive, monopolizing discourse analysis – which also considers the power interests – nor a genealogical type of analysis, the identification of the examined (discursive) entity's uniqueness, would describe the world-like events of computer games. In the same vein, we will not have our discourse analysis applied to video games broken into the four Foucauldian levels (formation of the subject, identification of statement variants, identification of the concept map's organizational principle, and strategic field)³ as we believe that regarding numerical games it is sufficient to analyse the 'set of information' the game provides for the player, that is, the examination of those specific 'communications' through which the game outlines its own limitations to the player as well as teaches them how to act correctly (in conformity with the rules) within these boundaries. Thus, a video game is in fact a discourse, a specific language that addresses

³ See Foucault, 1998.

the *necessity of entering the dialogue*, the discourse events, the communication process that characterizes the self-referential nature of virtual worlds, or, more precisely, the nature thereof owing to which the discursive and communicative 'statements' of the game's virtual world return through the player's avatar(s) to the very digital environment they have come from. Consequently, our discourse analysis will analyse the information exchange – and unfold the internal regularities thereof – taking place through the 'mediation' of the gestures between the game and the player as well as by way of the more or less consciously and expediently set off signals – doing all of this, of course, while keeping in view the *manner in which a gamer identity is attained*.

We may continue our critical discourse analysis with an interesting allegory that Kálmán Kittenberger tells us in his readable (sometimes 'suspiciously' well-readable) book *Vadász- és gyűjtőúton Kelet-Afrikában* [Hunting and Collecting in East Africa].⁴ He gives an account of the greater honeyguide's (*Indicator indicator*) highly intriguing feature, namely its occasional habit of guiding humans to beehives – once the honey is taken, the bird feeds on the larvae of the bees often stunned by smoke. This behaviour of the bird can be explained by evolutionary conditioning (we have knowledge of some even closer symbioses in the animal kingdom between mammals and birds, reptiles and birds, etc.) or some sort of *training* or even chance, but the story described above can hardly be labelled as ordinary: in one of the cases, the bird, instead of leading Kittenberger and his gun-bearers to a beehive, it guided them to an adder, and once the snake was killed, the bird grew quiet again, just like it used to do whenever humans hit upon a 'honey well'. We must add to the story that Kittenberger and his company of hunters found no beehives anywhere near the place of 'incident', not even a swarm of bees.

Kittenberger, as an old Africanist, feels right and proper to interpret the bird's 'actions' as follows:

Now, who could tell why the greater honeyguide led us to the nastiest member of the adder family, the puff adder? Similarly, how could we account for Sir F. Jackson's adventure with the leopard and the serval? [F. Jackson also relates two incidents when the greater honeyguide would lead him to the wrong species.] My version of the story as to how this could happen is that the greater honeyguide saw the cats and snakes as its

⁴ Kittenberger, 1985. 363–365.

enemies and, since by itself cannot do any harm to them, it would lead to them, whenever occasion serves, the eternal enemy of the inhabitants of wilderness: man himself.

This is an excellent allegory to illustrate the two attitudes the 'user of the discourse' manifests towards the *non-readable parts*. One of them is what Kittenberger and his companions do: they identify the factor that does not fit into the fabric determined by the discourse, put an end to the 'disorder', and interpret its nature. The other potential path of action to follow is that we *do not render the so far unaccountable experience as alien to the system/order*, but we broaden the scope of the discourse as we know (that is, built on the logical positioning of reasons) in a capacious 'philological gesture' as far as the unknown, the unusual, and the unexpected can all find their place 'therein'. But this expansion *should not be a discursive one*, that is, not as Kittenberger acted, who, besides his own reasoning – which *still* holds the bamboozlement committed by the *Indicator* a divergence –, in fact explained the bird's 'action' without bringing forward any sort of evidence for the possibility of another kind of interpretation regarding the bird's action – he did not presume that the bird's guiding humans to the honey as well as to the 'enemy' might be its natural behaviour. But since we, users of discourse, have a predilection for honey rather than for puff adders, we tend to think the real path is the one leading to the honey and a struggle-free, smooth progress is the natural way of the world.

The life-like, or – as we worded above – *world-like* simulations of video games come with a package filled with contingencies of unpleasant surprises that might await those involved in potentially dangerous situations. However, the process comes into its own exactly through accepting these unpredictable factors as a default feature. That is to say, a typical situation in a video game is when the player, upon following on the possibilities offered by the game, comes to certain points where they are forced to take decisions in order to stay in the game, and these decision-makings do not imply the metapositioning of the player towards the game, but the player tries to figure out the meaning of the 'problematic' stimulus as well as its role in the virtual world, and position their avatar accordingly. And, insofar as necessary, *that puff adder must be slain down* as otherwise *it* will overcome and eliminate the player. However, we must learn to accept that this point of decision is part of the game just as unhindered progress is, and we should not argue that the real gameplay is the one already known to us, while those unknown are merely divergent side-

tracks. Therefore, in order to reach a level where gamer identity is an accepted reality, we must first silence our prejudices, and *only then can we take action, rightfully and ethically, against the puff adder*; at this moment, our action will still be ethical even if we 'eliminate' the – virtual – puff adder as a result of our decision.

Thus, Kittenberger, was facing an unfamiliar situation: Nature acted contrary to his expectations; so, he places himself in a metaposition right away, and starts looking for precedents (F. Jackson), interpreting, and deducing, arranging Nature's unnatural behaviour into a valid referential discourse. This way, the bird will be understood, its behaviour is not confusing anymore as it has been integrated into a discourse that – in the gesture of apprehension – renders its speciality as ordinary. At the same time, it might come in handy to specify the fact that *Kittenberger*, while acquiring these experiences, *was taking part in an expedition, a hunting, that was not driven by survival or search for food supply*, meaning that he was urged by the eagerness to explore the unknown, and this is what took him to Africa to take part in big-game hunting⁵ for scientific reasons or to gain novel and thrilling experiences. Nevertheless, this sort of hunting *is more of a game than a hunting*, it is rather performing gestures of ritual occupation, drifting away from the original idea of hunting, which is search for food. But when the game 'takes control' or if the player does not recognize the rules of the alien (in the case of video games: virtual) world accepting him, they are inevitably doomed to a physical or ethical fall. Kittenberger was in fact playing a game in the real world, though not always successful in recognizing and complying with the internal rules thereof (which for the onlooker might as well appear to be devoid of any logic whatsoever).

However, this act of the big 'white hunter' – the interpretation of the situation –, his turning towards the 'physis' by resorting to 'nomos' is more than problematic. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, Kittenberger's act is inexcusable even if we have to bear in mind that his book *had to be readable enough* for publication. The man, the 'naturalist' (in our case: ethologist) facing a problem, the unexpected, cannot always afford himself to have a *lengthy* rumination, a discussion on the complexity of the situation he is involved in – F. Jackson, for instance had to shoot to save his own life, just like one of Kittenberger's gun-bearers killed the snake to avert a potentially lethal

⁵ The hunting of almost always large terrestrial mammals.

attack. Kittenberger did not have to do anything *then* as someone else was acting on his behalf; however, his verbal act is just as *murderous* as his servant's spear or F. Jackson's firearm, as he does not slay the animal in its *physical reality* but in its *cognoscibility*, since – as mentioned above – it is possible to do away with disturbing strangeness both in the virtual and the 'outside' world that carries the potential of real danger. However, we must beware that our discourse is not the one to declare the strange character of the perceived element, especially not in a way that, in the meantime, the discourse considers itself legitimate in a space whose causal system of rules it is unaware of. Actually, Kittenberger ascribes referentiality to his discourse while not being aware of the fact that due to his gestures and interpretation he is the truest outsider in the situation on the ground, he is the unethical one and not the *Indicator* that defies his expectations.

As a matter of fact, the *action ethics* of the video game is that the players, by and in their gestures, must accept the strange nature of the spaces and times emerging before their very eyes as well as that the entities 'found therein' can be interpreted exclusively within the game space, while, at the same time, players are free to act against unknown elements. In terms of discourse ethics, Kittenberger has failed, but he has successfully got away with his behaviour that qualifies as divergent concerning the greater honeyguide. But in order for the player to cope with the borderline situations of the simulated gameplay and to familiarize themselves with the game ethics, the player must first step up against their own aversion to strangeness.

The 'participants' in our example situation above performed some actions that are as close as they get to playing a video game: they set off on a journey to explore unknown territories only for reasons of gaining experience and knowledge (so, not to make a living), that is, in a self-serving manner, just the way it happens in games. However, when they come up against some barriers that function according to principles unknown to them, they take the liberty to *bring the unknown working principles of their game spaces under the sway of their discourse based on their own principles*. Thereby, they left the space and time of their gamer-like exploration and returned to the discourse's medium of linear events, as video game is the very first medium that with its *world-creating capacity* is capable of putting media users into 'real-life situations' – fortunately, without creating the circumstances for the physical dangers that are potentially lurking there. Kittenberger's negative example may serve us well in learning about *the openness towards challenges*

posed by the game and the ability to be attentive to the *capability of the mythical quest to consummate existence*, which succeeds even if the story we are part of lacks the categories of meaning and reference – and, consequently, those of ethical nature.

In what follows, we will touch upon the ethical implications of video game usage, and we continue to maintain the validity of our statement above that roaming about the digital worlds under our analysis cannot be qualified as an *a priori* condemnable phenomenon, but most often the players' circumstances of life are the conducive factors to carrying on experiences acquired inside the game's reality, even after leaving the virtual world, and to using them *in non-game contexts*.

Interferences of Real and Virtual Worlds⁶

The Australian's online edition broke some disturbing news on 17 June 2012: a Taiwanese boy lost his life after having played video games almost constantly for 40 hours in a row. Newspaper editors argue that the 18-year-old boy passed away due to circulatory failure as a result of a strenuous, abnormally prolonged sitting.⁷ Further news from the realm of gloomy reality, from far, far away, from the mythical lands of bank robbers with sawed-off shotguns and of Hollywood celebrities with extra-large account statements keep invading our old (crippled, dying?) continent and depict young video gamers (sometimes children) committing massacres in schools and other public spaces...⁸ But our overcivilized Europe could not be immune to such series of rampages either. Bringing forward the sole example of the Winnenden school shooting⁹ will presumably not entitle us to draw a general conclusion, but it will perfectly suit our purpose to illustrate

⁶ Excerpts from this chapter were also published in Korunk 2012/12. See Péter, 2012.

⁷ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/taiwan-teen-dies-after-gaming-for-40-hours/story-fn3dxix6-1226428437223>.

⁸ Unfortunately, we could cite plenty of examples here, but we shall consider a few instances only: 20 April 1999 – the Columbine high-school massacre. Perpetrators: Dylan Klebold (18 years) and Eric Harris (17 years). See: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/columbine-high-school-massacre>.

20 July 2012 – Aurora shooting. Perpetrator: James Eagan Holmes (25 years). Criminalists believe that video games could also influence the shooter in carrying through his gruesome act. See Holmes, 2012.

⁹ 11 March 2009 – the Winnenden school shooting. Perpetrator: Tim Kretschmer. See Kaiser, 2009.

that in our globalized world we can easily find people geographically situated far away from one another but with similar backgrounds and behavioural patterns. The articles cited here, mostly referring to experts, note that the juvenile offenders engaged in such shootings have spent a great amount of time playing – mostly the so-called role-playing shooter – video games. Besides, the 32-year-old Norwegian bomber and mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik was also allegedly playing video games during his preparation for the assassinations,¹⁰ but at the same time media organs stress that computer shooting games should not be taken as the triggering cause.¹¹ Simon Parkin publishes his aforesaid article in April 2012, and in it he convincingly argues that Breivik's motives are not to be looked for in the digitally generated virtual world, but he has been driven towards his 'killing spree' by lot more complex and *empirical* motivations.

Video games have had a 'criminal record' of their own anyway, combined with a negative media coverage and a poor public image; so, the numerous extreme events – a few of which we have already mentioned above – were the last thing the numerical–visual–interactive–entertainment-oriented industry needed. The wrong perception of video games may also be due to that the initial phase of their mass circulation was connected with amusement arcades equipped with analogue-digital, coin-operated game machines built to run some kind of program, basically functioning as sort of money pits, stormed by minors and dozens of adults 'meant for a better life' only to waste a vast amount of time, energy, and money seemingly to no purpose or end. This tendency is also corroborated by the fact that computer games have stayed under the radar of scientific analyses for a long time and only very few noteworthy analyses have come to light to treat this type of *new media*. Miguel Sicart also makes it clear that being ethical in the space and time of computer games means nothing else but following their rules, while condemning or 'blaming' them for their presumed negative effects on someone's lifestyle is at least as unethical as the immorality computer games are often labelled with.¹² As we have also pointed out above, *a game is a game by default*, and only external circumstances can turn it into a constituent of events with negative outcomes.

¹⁰ Pidd, 2012.

¹¹ Parkin, 2012.

¹² Sicart, 2009. 27–28.

Mentally created virtual worlds have always operated like this, providing cultures – regardless of the medium – with projection patterns whose incorporation into personalities had an undeniable influence over the matters of the *non-fictional world*. From this perspective, the verbalism of alterity, the printed publications of the Reformation and Enlightenment, television viewing reaching a global scale in the middle of the last century, and the significant presence of computer games since the 1970s are all analogous media with one another as each one of them offers alternative worlds that change the core being of their receivers as a result of physical actions of various importance performed in or with them. Applying Jauss’s interpretation of catharsis¹³ on numerical entertainment does not give computer games the privilege to have all aesthetic categories applied to arts so far automatically attached to them, but we must acknowledge that this particular ‘subspecies’ of interactive narrations, requiring digital mediation, disposes of some features that call for a ‘cosmetic’ approach – not necessarily that every computer game would or should be an eye-catching piece of art, but that experiencing them can only take place via an interface that, in order to be useable or recognizable at all, needs to appear *wieldy* (in Heidegger’s acceptance) and as such has to make possible the mediation between the player and the cyberworld. The internal systems of hyperspaces function by themselves as referentials, and their users and receivers will inevitably implement them – based on ‘cognitive handholds’ provided by external reference systems – into their everyday non-digital life practices; therefore, the ‘life-changing’ dimension of video games will unfold only in the process marked by the encounter between the digital and the physical worlds, which process is necessarily *artificial*, that is, an artefact, and, as such, we can trace back on it the process of this making, hidden behind elaboration – ideally, the user cannot see the code, they just use it via an aestheticized interface.

Digitally narrated worlds

Video games – as we have pointed out above – are in fact *interactive world-like simulations* that create such cultural and even geographical landmarks that can occasionally overwrite information coming from empirical access to the ‘real’ world and that can require such *proficiency in accessing* (information,

¹³ Jauss, 1999. 175.

data, etc.) that in certain cases cannot always be implemented outside of digitally generated spaces. But – as Breivik’s ‘example’ has already demonstrated – the skills acquired in digital games can sometimes emphatically interfere with the flow of real-life events. Of course, less striking cases have a much stronger presence, but our society tends to pay attention to outstanding events, while the more determining, conditioning operations may succeed practically without any reflection. As suggested before, media, behavioural, and cultural studies alike gave proof of a delayed reaction to the global-scale effects of video games and, unfortunately, they drew the bulk of their conclusions from these extreme examples. At the same time, this form of playing a game, which visibly does not tilt the player’s development in favour of society, seemed an increasingly unproductive activity in the untrained eyes of institutions that bring cultural canons under regulation on the arenas of transaction markets for social goods as well as on forums through their conducts.

Gadamer describes gaming as a hermeneutical activity *par excellence* during what the player assumes a state of total subjection to the gameplay, through which they favour the game’s inherent teleology¹⁴. From this perspective, not only video gaming becomes legitimate but also all *game-like* activities with an in-built purpose; however, as we have remarked in our introductory lines, owing to a series of events getting wide media coverage, public opinion has stigmatized and science has for long unfairly ignored video games – thus, we might add, it was neglectful, at the same time, of elaborating or even employing the theories providing the hermeneutical legitimation thereof ... whereas it is indisputable that, despite the interactive virtual worlds that adopt computer as their medium, the prolonged aversion on the part of the sciences, and the negative public reaction, video games become an increasingly important part of our daily lives; and now we have to accept it as a natural fact that: for the generations born into the medium of digital devices following the Internet boom and its use becoming commonplace, wandering about the realms of *Elder Scrolls* for several weeks seems a lot more natural than the daily chore of taking out the garbage.

Nevertheless – as we can establish without having resort to any scientific background information –, virtual spaces are not free from the ideologies of the ‘physical world’ either and computer games are more of

¹⁴ Gadamer, 1976. 53.

a *market player* than entities promoting social accommodation and socialization. But it is undeniable that both single-player games and Internet games, which allow the simultaneous participation of large masses of players, provide particular, novel virtual-world experiences for those playing them, and these experiences can serve as common references outside the virtual gaming worlds too. Regrettably, video gamers are mistakenly subject to a number of stereotypes – especially thanks to the silly movies of the Hollywood ‘nightmare factory’, public opinion classifies them as overweight, frustrated, unwashed freaks locking themselves up in their rooms or, at best, as ‘hacker prodigies’. One need only look at any *active* online or multiplayer (involving several live characters) game to easily acknowledge that, parallel to today’s absurd politics and our daily lives packed with petty compromises along our struggles for everyday survival, there are *virtual realms* of formidable size and complexity unfolding in the hyperspaces of infinite possibilities. Another stereotypical view makes us look for the typical player among underage boys. A detailed statistics would probably be available at companies operating massively multiplayer online games (using random samples combined with, say, questionnaires would not likely hold out the promise of revealing the scale of this phenomenon), which information, however, they would not give away on the grounds of being business secrets; none the less, accounts of Gábor Laufer’s own experiences also tell us about adults using single- or multiplayer video games.

From the increasingly frequently organized video game championships to simulated worlds of immense complexity, countless formal as well as informal gamer forums are constantly emerging and determining to an ever-larger extent the experiencing of cultures, wherever these may be. One blessing of globalization is the evolution of digital devices and communication channels into entities of global complexity,¹⁵ which, on the one hand, catalyses the convergence of cultures and, on the other, it has played a decisive role in the emergence of new models of culture.

It is enough to mention the hundred-thousand-strong crowd of players who enter on a daily basis the parallel reality of the *World of Warcraft*, a 2004 debutante combining mediaeval, fantasy, and hypermodern

¹⁵ Except, of course, the extreme cases such as the economically underdeveloped, civil-war zones of Africa (e.g. Somalia), the North Korean public communications system paralysed by communist censorship, etc.

elements, where players are enticed by fully-developed alternative mythologies built on archetypes inspired from the various cultures of the physical world. But there is also *StarCraft*, a sci-fi strategy game launched in 1998 with a more modest and not so much mythicized gameplay, which still has not lost its charm to allure great masses of players. Any attempt at taking stock of the numberless MMOs¹⁶ – whose significant proportion is of a science-fiction nature – in order to pick out the greatest, the most successful one that generates the most profit, the most spectacular, or the bloodiest one would be to no avail as the currently available resources could assist us in incorporating them into a meaningful critical narration only if we took no notice of the uniqueness and specific qualities of every experience and mode of use, which, however, would strip them of the very essence of gaming experience. As to their functionality, virtual worlds that include masses of people and are specialized in hyperculture development necessarily relate to some of the real-world structures – occasionally, the program itself is designed in such a way as to expect online players to adapt to certain systems of requirements brought along from ‘outside’. However, the fact that one can stop or quit playing them at any time deprives them of their referential character and actually qualifies them as inconclusive. Since most video games may reward their players exclusively within the limits of their virtual space (otherwise, we would have to include them in the category of online gambles or social sweepstakes), they compensate for their *non-reality* – namely for the fact that we can switch them off without any consequences to the physical reality – with mechanisms causing specific psychological dependence used by game developers aiming at having those joining in spend as much time as possible in their cyberworlds ‘populated’ by people coming from the four corners of our planet. In addition – and this refers mostly to free portals –, they try to maintain their servers and staff with overt or covert product promotions. However, since these procedures are usually business secrets, we must be content with generalizing our empirical experiences. On the other hand, it would not be fair to analyse every (free) mass online game along its specific economic features because all online video games requiring groups of people can be also described along these groups’ behaviours/attitudes and along the transposition of these behaviours into

¹⁶ Abbreviation for: Massively Multiplayer Online Game.

other media – as those playing, for instance, the Facebook-based *Farmville*¹⁷ or *CityVille*, developed by the San Francisco-established Zynga, will probably meet up in other (hyper)spaces as well, but following up these encounters and information exchanges is considered unethical in the eyes of all scientific disciplines for tracing personal interactions in both public cyberspace and private chatrooms should be subject to prohibition.¹⁸ Games designed around empire conquests, waging wars, or peaceful constructions and developments equally require their participants to pay maximum attention to *internal* events while they are *present*, but, at the same time, they do not always provide contents that are congruent with the values detectable based upon the player's cultural concept.

In addition to self-organizing worlds – that we might as well call democratic – with a barely perceptible, sometimes hidden 'moderation', the video game phenomenon nowadays has an enormous organizational framework as well.

So, foreign literature, awoken from its initial slow reception, is now virtually in full bloom in direct proportion to the exponentially growing titles published by foreign game development studios, while speaking in domestic terms – having remained stuck so far with a culture promoting conservatism that not always yields positive results –, we can rarely encounter video game development initiatives stretching the limits of virtual reality. One can meet extremely few cases of such 'digital white crows' to float above our virtual Hungarian sky confined within the ever-smothering embrace of the Carpathians, whereas acquiring a skill set directly usable in interactive digital worlds would offer a lot more beneficial assistance in maintaining our culture – e.g. lamenting the glorious past – that gradually finds itself at the mercy of international financial institutions.

¹⁷ *Farmville* also allows the creation of worlds that work analogously to the real one though their 'building blocks' run *shockingly* counter to each other.

¹⁸ Theoretically, these measures are indeed prohibited and in practice we usually do not really care about whether or not the Internet provider, the program used, or the person next to us retains whatever we communicate with our 'virtual friend' (this stays valid, of course, for cases when we are not handling valuable/sensitive data). Besides, the relationship between the Internet and the private sphere is a highly debated issue nowadays, creating a forum for countless ethical blunders and felicitous expressions of opinion alike. According to our observations, the 'inclusion' of neither the currently valid legislation nor the determining patterns of our actions can help us to get our bearings in these virtual spaces with a transparent operating rules not yet formed.

What is more, video games and *life-like*, interactive simulations would ensure an efficient medium of preserving and interpreting the past. We only need to mention historian Tamás Baltavári (student at Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University) and Rómeó Partigh Kis (student at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary), who used the software of Creative Assembly to create the digital, animated reconstruction of the Battle of Mohács, among others. This is the background for the initiative of the *Történelmi Animációs Egyesület* (Society for Historical Animations) and of the Hungarian National Digital Archive, which aims at creating the possibility to re-enact the significant battles of Hungarian history.¹⁹ But obviously monopolizing the ludic virtual spaces and times for the rehabilitation of actual events would be preposterous – it is much more appropriate to leave them in their *quasi-private/separate reality*, that is to say: to make them as independent as possible from historically charged ideas that are not always ethically coded, and give them the freedom of interpretation that takes place in the course of their happening.

While the numerical monsters' pillar legs are rumbling on the global market struggling to get to grips with reality and cyber dragons take flight from the four corners of the world, their wings blocking the simulated suns, we cannot vouch with all certainty for a home-programed Neo, forged in the very depths of Hungarian culture, that he could truly dodge the bullets of any Agent Smith. The 1983-founded, Budapest-based video game development company, Novotrade International (later Appaloosa Interactive), closed its gates in 2006;²⁰ after more than a decade of existence, the also Budapest-based Black Hole Entertainment was facing serious financial challenges in 2012;²¹ and Philos Laboratories could not stay afloat either, not even for ten years, on the global market of interactive entertainment companies.²² Zen Studios (formerly known as Rubik Interactive), for instance, is still in business: it is mostly specialized in digital emulations of amusement arcade machines (Pinball, Flipper, etc.), but it also creates low- to mid-range shooting games (e.g. *The Punisher – No Mercy*, 2009). It is our duty to pay special tribute to the Hungarian game developer team of SoftView,

¹⁹ <http://www.origo.hu/techbazis/szamitogep/20120327-ingyenes-jatek-keszul-a-nagy-magyar-csatakbol.html>.

²⁰ <http://www.mobygames.com/company/appaloosa-interactive-corporation>.

²¹ www.pcguru.hu/pcguru/cikkek.php?cikkid=21408.

²² <http://modzone.web4.hu/cikk/philos-laboratories-egy-nagy-ceg-bukasa>.

which – according to the interview published in Tamás Beregi’s book –²³ took upon themselves the bulk of the 1987-published legendary *The Last Ninja*, which eventually saw the light under the aegis of System 3 as an action-adventure game developed for Commodore 64 and which the American *System 3* ‘generously’ failed to reward, while, at that, they also liberated them of the source code of the world-famous multi-sequel game.

So, it appears that neither the one-time nor recent ‘virtualia developers’ could spin resounding, Hungarian-‘rooted’ success stories, which could later on – considering the current virtualization tendencies – work even to the disadvantage of the Hungarian culture.

As a matter of course, we do not inhabit the spaces of computer games in our flesh-and- blood forms but through our gestures, our intentions brought into play, and, of course, our attitude that always makes a mark. Each and every game space imposes its own set of rules on those joining them, but they also let their players manifest as individuals in the realm of binary digits. Experiencing mediation into the digital world, that is, the individual’s voluntary subordination to the numerical medium entails that through their virtual actions players have to reflect the simulated world, but – as we have pointed out above – it is not an absolute necessity that these actions be in line with a real-world system of requirements. Thus, digitalia *a priori* alter us and ‘tamper into’ our being, but not like earlier media, which – even though their reception required a ‘whole person’ – could not create such a complex, empirical world as video games can by virtue of their ability to truly captivate players wandering in their hyperspaces, as these games can involve far more senses in their processes than any analogue or high-tech predecessor of them.

Conclusions

Video games, stigmatized by the *real-world* public opinion as factors triggering dissociative attitude, have developed into activities permeating the lives of generations – so, they are the central characters of much more than play-rooms or (amusement) arcades inhabited by spotty teenagers. By the dawn of the third millennium, video games have also grown out of their adolescence and have developed into top-listed products and

²³ Beregi, 2010. 194–209.

business activities of global media enterprises. Since by definition they are games, their primary purpose is *game itself*; however, as a few of the above paragraphs have already discussed, they also have a growing economic and social impact (we must note that they are not quantifiable from every aspect), whereas certain interests can be traced down as well behind the events taking place in hyperspaces. There is a generally identifiable tendency that *world-like interactive hyperspaces*, most often named 'video games', are gaining more and more ground in the lives of individuals and communities alike. Too little time has elapsed since the appearance of video games for us to detect clearly outstanding analogue-digital interferences, but we can already ascertain that the series of activities taking place on our planet are inevitably moving towards the increasingly dominant digitalization, virtualization. We are not to give any predictions here, but we assume that this tendency will gradually grow, and very probably we will not enter the *Matrix* but the *Matrix* will interfere with the process of real events.

Furthermore, we believe it is utterly important to accept that digital games cannot be played exclusively *for internal pleasures* due to the current system of ethics, and with our minds liberated by way of this very acceptance it is worth taking on a journey to explore the *brave new world* of new kind of infinite spaces, times, and 'shape-shifting' identities.

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