



Videoludic narratives and digital society: contemporary issues in pixel format

Narrativas videolúdicas y sociedad digital: la problemática contemporánea en formato píxel

Narrativas videolúdicas e sociedade digital: problemas contemporâneos em formato píxel

INTRODUCTION

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Abstract:

This monograph aims to reflect on how the world of video games can show and study aspects such as loneliness, death, wars, humanitarian crises, environmentalism and identities. To this end, a varied cast of specialists on the subject, applying a holistic approach that combines game studies, sociology, international relations, cultural studies and gender studies,

take advantage of the potential of the medium to make a novel and complex portrait of everything we can play, which is nothing less than our reality, with all its edges.

KEYWORDS

Video games, Contemporary issues, Digital society, Game studies

Resumen:

El presente monográfico pretende reflexionar cómo desde el mundo del videojuego se pueden mostrar y estudiar aspectos como la soledad, la muerte, las guerras, las crisis humanitarias, el ecologismo o las identidades. Para ello, aplicando un enfoque holístico que combina los *game studies*, la sociología, las relaciones internacionales, los estudios culturales o los estudios de género, un variado elenco de especialistas sobre el tema aprovecha las potencialidades del medio para hacer un retrato novedoso y complejo de todo aquello a lo que podemos jugar, que no es ni más ni menos que nuestra realidad, con todas sus aristas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Videojuegos, Problemáticas contemporáneas, Sociedad digital, *Game studies*

Resumo

Esta edição tem como objetivo refletir sobre como aspectos como solidão, morte, guerras, crises humanitárias, ambientalismo ou identidades podem ser mostrados e estudados a partir do mundo dos videogames. Para isso, um elenco variado de especialistas no assunto, aplicando uma abordagem holística que combina *game studies*, sociologia, relações internacionais, estudos culturais ou estudos de gênero, aproveita o potencial do meio para fazer um retrato novo e complexo de tudo que podemos jogar, que não é nem mais nem menos do que a nossa realidade, com todos os seus cisalhamentos e arestas.

PALABRAS-CHAVE

Videogame, Problemas contemporâneos, Sociedade digital, *Game studies*.

Our societies are increasingly playful, and video games are one area where much of the subjectivity and artistic education of people, including young people, is constructed. Video games, in their different genres and categorizations, have an enormous power of centrality and social representation due to their relation to the construction of cultural identities, the diversity of their forms of expression, and their projection as a universal language. Both developers and players are capable of projecting the realities they experience onto them.

As a cultural artifact, video games implicitly carry an ideology that, like the construction of meaning, is reflected and carried out through the gaming experience, commonly known as gameplay. As such, they entail problems of a political, economic or social nature: armed conflicts, humanitarian crises (famines, refugees), the consequences of neoliberalism, climate

change, loneliness, suicide, sexual identity, racism and marginalization, to mention only a few.

In this regard, video games should be understood as sociospatial practices in which the physical world and ludic space feed off each other, especially in those video games that reflect armed conflicts inspired in real or plausible situations, as in the case of the Tom Clancy franchise's *The Division* (2016-2018) or visions of the world with a marked colonialist character, such as Sid Meier's series of strategy video games *Civilization* (1991-2016). Although, as with other media, many of the games are in alignment with the *status quo*, there are other riskier ones that address themes like loneliness, relationships or the consequences of economic crises such as *Night in the Woods* (Infinite Fall, 2017), *The Stillness of the Wind* (Fellow Traveller, 2019) and *Kentucky Route Zero* (2011-2020).

Since video games are an eminently interactive medium, as expressive-artistic media they enable us to explore themes addressed by each particular game in a totally different and active way compared to their predecessors. With this monograph we aim to analyze in depth how some typical problems of our time and society are reflected in the world of video games and through the defining elements of the language of the medium. There can be no full citizenship without a ludic literacy in which you can access video games, understand their meaning and create content through the medium.

The articles contained in this monograph testify, once again, to the boom in the representation of video games in multiple cultural and academic events, from exhibitions (*Games and Politics; Video games: The two sides of the screen; Homo Ludens: Video games to understand the present*) to publications in specialized media (Moreno and Venegas, 2020; Martín and Navarro, 2021; Gómez-García *et al.*, 2021), and relevant meetings of experts such as the First International Congress of DiGRA Spain 2021, held in Mataró last year. These events are very important examples of the interest that these “videoludic cultural artifacts” continue to arouse. Perhaps their success is not so much because they faithfully reflect the reality that surrounds us, but rather their ability to move us when we sit in front of the screen. As Electronic Arts predicted back in 1983, “video games would bring people’s thoughts and emotions closer” (Anable, 2018: IX)

In this regard, the article “Video games and global citizenship: Analysis of the applicability of *Never Alone* in educational contexts” analyzes how there is still some resistance on the part of teachers and parents to the use of video games in the classroom. This is why Marta Pérez, Iria Sobrino and Marta Rodríguez propose an analysis model to measure the suitability of vi-

deo games in education from the perspective of education for development and global citizenship, combining methodologies of this current with others specific to video game studios and applying it to the case of *Never Alone*.

Carlos Ramírez proposes in his research “Call me by my name: Analysis of the strategies of erosion and stereotyping of bisexuality in video games” a categorization of the main strategies of erosion and stereotyping of bisexuality in video games, in order to delve into the quality of their representation and the characteristics that make video games a unique medium for this purpose.

In “Democratic characteristics in government simulation video games”, Carlos Moreno carries out a study of the democratic characteristics present in the relationship between the player and the virtual citizens in various video games for the management of a political community. The study analyzes various mechanisms of informal citizen counterpower based on the representation of a political and legitimate conflict or framed in a problem of productivity or delinquency, and in which significant deficits in the areas of deliberation and participation in decision-making are observed, proposing alternative mechanisms.

Next, Antonio César Moreno, in “Techno-nationalism and reconstruction of the past in China through video games”, analyzes how the different educational and cultural organisms of China, especially since the Patriotic Education campaign of Jiang Zeming, have used the format of video games to promote nationalism and rewrite China’s past through *cultural digital techno-nationalism*. He highlights the importance of Chinese video games in promoting state ideology and uniting society around a series of myths and historical themes. In the same vein, referring to international geopolitics, nationa-

lism and digital propaganda, José Antonio Moya's text focuses on Russia and its main creations related to war.

In "Empowerment in the representation of female video game characters: Raising awareness of social problems with *The Last of Us Part II*", Guillermo Paredes studies *The Last of Us Part II*, by Naughty Dog, with the aim of analyzing the empowerment of the women who appear in it and how social problems of contemporary society, such as homophobia or ideological extremism, are manifested through them.

In "Conscientious ludonarratives: Narrative adventures to promote the representation of minority groups", Alberto Porta reflects on how conscientious ludonarratives can promote critical thinking in players, and they do so by means of a complex ludic-narrative interweaving following the clear concerns of designers who seek to transmit specific values that can be applied beyond the ludofictional world.

Tomás Grau, in the article "*Flash*, Newgrounds and the confluence between the history of the Internet and video games", reviews the importance of the flash editing program in the config-

uration of various artistic movements linked to the virtual sphere at the beginning of the 21st century. He examines its influence on popular culture and its relationship with the creative communities that emerged in this ecosystem, and the future that awaits them and the content generated.

The issue closes with two texts inserted in the miscellaneous section: *Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Representation of childhood fears through the independent video game Fobos* and "Scrubbing up on-line: How best practice hospital websites can drive medical tourism". In the first, appealing to the expressive, artistic and didactic nature of video games, Rocío Serna-Rodrigo and Albert Solé analyze how these metatexts are capable of reflecting the fears of children's and young adult literature in pixel format. Finally, Natàlia Ferrer-Roca, Sílvia Espinosa-Mirabet and Andréa Oliveira explore the communicative management of hospitals through their corporate websites, whose intention is to convey reliability and credibility in order to establish relationships with users in the field of health tourism.

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