

COMMUNICATION IN VIDEOGAMES: EDITORIAL NOTE

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The video game history can be traced to history that goes hand in hand with the history of modern computing. This story, if not taken only by the bias of the “evolution” of digital technologies, can also (and should) be read from key moments that represent movements and tensions of cultural, economic and social, directly related to each of their times. No wonder the first game running on a digital computer, *Spacewar!*, developed between the years 1961 and 1962 by Steve Russell et. al. on a DEC PDP-1 computer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), points to issues in vogue at the time, notably the arms race between the US and the then USSR in the context of the Cold War: *Spacewar!* simulates, in a cathode ray tube, a battle between two spacecraft. As stated by the creative director of Atari, Paul Steed⁴, “it was a reflection of the time. There was that paranoia with the Soviets. A fear of the Communists attack. The game directly reached the collective unconscious of society saying, ‘we are afraid the war might burst’”. Far from being a neutral or naïf, as many still insist on seeing them, videogames, since its inception, are consistent (implicitly or explicitly) directly with the various social spheres of their time. *Zeitgeist*.

Among the first videogames developed in history, *Tennis for Two* in 1958, and the eighth generation of consoles, an entire half-century has passed. During this period, hundreds of consoles dedicated to electronic games were launched by hundreds of companies, not to mention personal computers, which since its inception in the 1970s, paid in large part to the development and video game enjoyment. The squared sprites of *Donkey Kong* in the Atari 2600 in 1981, with its rudimentary graphics and sounds, to advanced 3D graphics and multi-channel sound from the current generation of games, great were the changes regarding the content of the digital game, particularly as refers to one of the most important aspects in its characterization as a media instance: their ability to communicate, either textually, visually, audibly or, as is common sense say these days, *multimedialy*. Whether through elaborate stories and narratives that are presented directly to the player (in written form, narrated) or through more subtle ways, metacommunicational, the presence of textual component (the understanding textual broadly, as shown, for example, by greimasian semiotics) is key player in most games, regardless of their intent: pure entertainment; political and social awareness; presentation of products and brands; aesthetic experience, and so forth. Something essential and that connects to this extraordinary faculty developed by humans since time immemorial: communication.

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⁴ In the documentary “Rise of the Video Game” (2007) produced by the Discovery Channel.

Precisely because of the growing importance of this medium on the global stage, the last fifteen years videogames have been thoroughly investigated from a myriad of angles: psychology, education, anthropology, computer science, economics, arts, etc. As with older media such as literature, the press, photography and cinema, videogames have been used as means of communication and expression in several areas, including: Advertising (*Advergames*), Journalism (NewsGames), Communication Policy (Serious games and Political Games), among others. So at this moment in videogame history, we believe that there are several unanswered questions: can video games be treated as a strong medium of communication? What new possibilities this medium in particular can bring and add to the field of communication, in the broad sense? There are restrictions on the use of videogames as a mean of communication, in relation to the oldest and most established medium? These are some of the issues that the articles published in this issue of Communication and Society intend to discuss, not to get to a final and definitive answers, but at least to bring new thoughts on this medium of growing importance in the global academia. The call for papers for this edition, held in international and specific discussion forums in the areas of game studies and communication — like GamesNetwork, the ECREA (Europe), SOPCOM and SPCV (Portugal), and the Compós and SBGames (Brazil) — has been widely accepted, receiving a strong record of proposals, from which we selected eleven for publication.

The current edition is divided into two parts: the first, called “Communication, Theory of Games and Dialogues (Inter)mediatics” consists of six articles that have as common axis the relationship between the exercised debates in the field and the Game Studies communication, in its aspect *intermediatic* (or *transmediatic*). The second, called “Communication, Expressiveness and Narrativity in Videogames”, consists of five articles whose common axis debates in the field of Narratology (or studies of narrative) and the expressive character present in (or which was provided by) videogames.

Opening the issue, Riccardo Fassone, researcher at the Università degli Studi di Torino, takes the theory of “play acts” from Gregory Bateson, to seek to understand the meta-communicative function present in video games. By analyzing the features, characteristics and implications of the expression “This is video game play,” the author tries to understand the rules, taken here as an essential element in the composition of video games, work as part responsible for the meta-communication contained in the above expression. Finally, the author presents an analysis of the game *Papers, Please*, Lucas Pope, reflecting on its communicative potential.

Then Söbke Heinrich and Thomas Bröker, researchers at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, reflect on the types of communication present in videogames through *Fliplife* game analysis. From the common definition of communication as the act to provide information from a sender to a receiver, the authors seek to carry out a categorization of types of communication in video games from an abstract model based on fundamental / essential definitions, taking into account furthermore, the interactive feature of videogames as an essential factor in the consideration of the roles formerly hard, emitter / receiver.

Christophe Duret, a researcher at the Université de Sherbrooke, based on the concept of Procedural Rhetoric, as coined by Ian Bogost, proposes in his article, to reflect on

the game *Every Day the Same Dream* as a Thesis game, making already a reference to the concept of Novel Thesis, as proposed by Suleiman (1983). Duret argues, therefore, that the meeting of hermeneutics with the cognitive sciences can provide theoretical apparatus to describe the strategies used to disseminate a persuasive message in the context of video games.

Continuing the edition, Birgit Swoboda of the University of Vienna, analyzes the forms of (inter) textual communication used mostly in MMORPG genre of games. For the author, the current forms of communication employed in various technologies and text-based communication systems such as smileys, acronyms and neologisms, rather than being a deterioration of language, position raised by many theorists and even by renowned writers, serve as creativity instances, efficiency and as “tribal” markers, besides serving as interaction strategies in speech within the context of video games.

Sercan Sengün, the Istanbul Bilgi University, based on the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Berger, search in this text to understand how the avatars of certain types of video game, especially online games - in which there is a possibility of real conversation between players - become sources of information about the players. Starting from that, which for the author belongs essentially to the field of communication - the relationship between authenticity and representation in virtual worlds through the Avatar figure, Sengün also reflects on self and avatar, based on the semiotic theories of Saussure and Lacan.

Finishing the first part of the issue, the Brazilian researcher Suely Fragoso, from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, reflects on the spatial experience in videogames, relating it to other media bodies such as literature, painting, photography, cinema and television. From investigations into the immersion and interactivity phenomena present in videogames, the author proposes, based on a theoretical framework consisting of “three types of space,” the thinking spatiality in video games as a dynamic composition that goes through several levels of meaning.

Opening the second half, the researchers Carlos Magno Mendonça and Filipe Freitas, of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, within the context of Narratology - but not sticking to it *strictu sensu* - seek to understand the possibility of thinking the game as text-game, based on the theories developed by Iser and Dewey. The authors analyze independent casual games like *Small Worlds*, *Grey*, *The Beggar* and *Dys4ia*, seeking to understand the ways in which the aesthetic potential of the medium may be reconsidered.

Then the researcher Antonio de la Maza, from the Centro Universitario de Tecnología y Arte Digital de Madrid, proposes, based on the concept of possible worlds (Lenzen, 2004; Lewis, 1986), a new approach to video games as ludofictional worlds “a set of possible worlds generating a game space based on the relationship between rules and fiction” in which the character’s position determines its real world and its next possible world. Finally, the author presents an analysis of the game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, to demonstrate their assumptions about ludofictional worlds.

Helyom Viana Telles and Lynn Alves, researchers at the University of Bahia State, intend to think the historical games as border works, ie works in the currencies that would separate history and fiction are in a state of fading. Therefore, based on the questioning

of the epistemological status of history as science, the authors analyze audiovisual elements present in video games in order to understand how the narratives of historical games work to promote and disseminate knowledge and / or imagery about the historical past.

Continuing the issue, Lilian França, from the Federal University of Sergipe, proposes to analyze the *newsgame*, *De volta a 1964: sua vida em tempos de ditadura*, a game released by the Brazilian magazine *Superinteressante* in 2014 as a way to review the fifty years of the beginning of the period known as military dictatorship in the country. Based on the theories developed by various authors of the science of videogames, the article seeks to understand how the *newsgames* in general and *De Volta a 1964...* in particular, can use gaming experiences to provide reflections on history.

Finally, ending the two parties dedicated to the cover theme, Elisa Barboza, a researcher at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, analyzes the *music video* as media format and its transition from TV to the Internet, as well as its rise, especially in online platforms YouTube and Vimeo. From a history of the emergence of the music video and its relationship with the experimental film and video art, the article explores the present narrative experiences in interactive music videos, particularly those produced by the band Arcade Fire.

In *Varia* section, professor Moisés de Lemos Martins, from the University of Minho, presents a text on academic freedom, which discusses the dangers that plague the current academic thinking, since the international rankings to the quality platforms, all are numbers, from human little remains. Continuing the *Varia* section, the researchers, Anabela Santos, Carla Cerqueira and Rosa Cabecinhas of the Communication and Society Studies Center write an article about the work performed on the dissection of gender representations in Portuguese *newsmagazines*.

The publication ends with the presentation of a critical review written by Artur Coelho, from the Agrupamento de Escolas Venda do Pinheiro, on the work "Video Games in Portugal: History, Technology and Art" (2013) N. Zagalo, edited by FCA. It is a book that explores the history of production and creation of video games in Portugal for the past 30 years.