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DISORIENTING THE LOGICAL: ON THE GESTURAL POETICS OF VIDEO GAMES

Abstract. *This paper presents an analysis of video games by focusing on the gaming process and its uniquely dynamic configuration (e.g. psychological/semiotic, aes¬thetic, and potentially political). It first explores the two major challenges that make a strong rationale for such a focus and then it goes on to define video games in reference to the question they formally share with cal-ligraphic practice. Lastly, the paper considers the specific influence of manga, the Japanese comic art, on the (de) sign of video games as a way to further probe into their engaging semiotic dynamics. Formally and thematical-ly, the analysis shows that video games are evocative of the way we engage with the world through the gestural regimes of language and imagination.*
Keywords: *imagination, (virtually-mediated) language, gesture, poetics, play, manga, tragic subjectivity*

Introduction

Imagine the imploding gaze towards the depths of one's obscure world, the dilation of experience due to the 'sign' becoming dissolved in emotion through experiment with chance and probability, the seduction of poten-tially liberating hand movement, the profuse power of impressible imagina-tion. This imagination and playing does not *happen to* the image or the text, and it certainly does not *happen to* video games; it *is* the game. One can justifiably argue that we can hardly equate playing and imagination with video games themselves. In fact, defining video games somehow always ends up being implausible, given both the 'big' machinery of the complex culture behind video-games making and all the 'small' details that make the final video game 'product' desirable for its 'added value'. It is precisely for this reason that video game studies would benefit from an approach that 'unpacks' the product in its specifically dynamic dimension deployed as it is through the generic act of gameplay. In order to do so, video games in this paper are approached in terms of their overlooked expressive and relationally semiotic constitution, specifics of which have psychological,

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aesthetic and potentially political signature. This juncture captures the dynamic dimension conceptualized here as gestural poetics of video games. After considering why we need to look at games as gestural or 'calligraphic' regime which disorients the logical while finding support in it[1], the paper will use the case of Japanese *manga* and its pervasive influence on videogames as a way to additionally probe into their poetical and potentially political load by thematizing the concept of *tragic subjectivity*.

Obviously, object of the current analysis are not board or card games played on a computer, but the form of gaming which is specific to video games and can be named *virtual environment* games (games that create a 'game world', a populated space that is sensed as alive). Methodologically, the nature of our approach has to be 'intersectional' in and between the cultural domains of both 'ideas' and 'practices'. Namely, our challenge in understanding video games is depicted in the nodal entry point throughout this analysis: what do video games do, as if, 'for us' and what do they say, if anything, about us? Holding this focus while saying anything unique i.e. specific to video games shifts the understanding of video games from their parts (e.g. structured aspects such as rules, narratives, props, or even space-time taken in measurable terms), to the level at which these fragments come to *be* game: when one plays. The intention is to persist on the thin line where one wonders if the attitude of not doing away with the complexity of these human creations is possible, and even useful, to the point that it does not diminish our analytical power. However, there is always more and always less in our personal, social and political practices than what we inscribe in them. And it is at this level that the current paper refuses to pretend that we know what video games are all about, or worse "spare other people the trouble of thinking" (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953/1986: viii).

Fastened space: video games as a calligraphic case of human doing

There are at least two substantial reasons which puzzle the clear-cut thinking of video games and which, when closely approached, feel like you have picked up two plasma grenades and know not how to deactivate them.

Firstly, the *plurality* of video games in terms of their genre, plot, complexity and aesthetics makes it almost impossible to approach them 'en bloc' in a sensible manner. No complex and overarching argument is needed to support this claim. Video games in their similarity of details but not overall

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[1] *For non-theoretical (and, for the author of this text, inspiring) descriptions of calligraphy understood, we could say, as intimate and imaginative development of the sign, an integral play between image and text, the reader can see the art catalogue accompanying an exhibition on calligraphy in Venice. Museo Correr (2010): La poetica dello spazio scritto: scrittura a mano e calligrafia. Venezia: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia.*

similarity and vice versa (in their overall similarity but not that of details) are an elegant example of the claim made by Wittgenstein (1953/1986) that we can establish only "family resemblances" when delineating the common features of games. Take for example the old-school 'kung-fu movies' video game *Mortal Kombat*, which brought extreme violence once and for all into video games. *Mortal Kombat* overlaps more with *Tekken*, much less with the narrative shooter *Half-Life 2*, and almost certainly not with *Little Big planet*, where players are expected to work together and all the rewards earned are shared with everyone. Various multiplayer games are often than not a competitive affair, and many games fall into this *agōn* and 'beat-em-up' genre. But there are also massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMOR-PGs) like *World of Warcraft*, where players interact based on social strategies and ability to cooperate, just as there are mono player games such as *Super Mario Bros*, which have variations on the 'rescue the Mushroom princess from the evil turtles' narrative. In other words, in some games you succeed because of excellent hand-eye coordination, reflexes and motor skills, in others because you have high-level of strategy combined with patience, in still others because you are a good puzzle solver and exhibit skills of logic and deduction. They all contribute to video games being defined as a designed goal-based interaction/experience, but this approach, even if not incorrect, *deemphasizes* the importance of the *process* of gaming and the *totality* of this experience. The goal-achievement is part of the whole, but not the whole (of gaming) itself, not to mention that many games do not have explicit goal at all (e.g. *Second Life*), whereas some games are flexible enough that a player can complete missions in ways not predicted by the game's designer (e.g. the narrative-based shooter *Deus Ex*). Examples abound also according to other parameters such as game play rules, character and story complexity and aesthetics.

Secondly, video games are *constituted* by input which is not supported by the simulation in any way. And we are not referring here to the game controller (the *joy*pad, the gamepad, or parallel use of mouse and keyboard etc.). Namely, however small or uninteresting it might be, the effort demanded on the part of the player is never trivial. The experience which is generic (but not exclusive) to all video games is the manipulation with signs by the player, which creates new signs. This manipulation relies on representations that are not supported by the codes or rules of the game script. For instance, a player 'reads in' a racist or ethnic issue and makes future moves and decisions based on this imaginative input as much as the game-generated narrative. This means that the 'space of the work' in video games is alive, undergoing constant changes which involve the player to a considerable degree. Hence, if we agree that constitutive part of the video games' regime is the player's 'play-formance' and 'psyche-formance' (one is

not at war, but *playing* to be at war, and yet paradoxically one *is* at war as an effect of strong dynamic immersion), then we are faced with the problem of the *immeasurable*. And the latter is directly convoluted with the conditions needed to account for the process of game play, the human part of the equation[2]. The emphasis on human participation and the invocation of the pair *psyche*formance and *play*formance cannot be taken lightly. Strictly speaking, to give a proper *psycho*logical articulation[3] does not mean to account for the inner processes (and what would that really mean?), but to account for the *boundary* where the me contacts the non-me, which is to say the consubstantiality of the sense of me and whatever is 'other' to that sense of me, e.g. my memory of you, a real fellow, desire, my favorite virtual enemy etc. Our psychological articulation is dependable and focused neither exclusively on the 'here' nor on 'there' (which is already a paralogism), but on the contacting boundary which *co-creates* 'here and there', 'this' and 'that'. The focus is the *psyche* as a *process on a boundary*, the psyche as a push translated into emotion, hunger translated into an appetite; a drive which becomes this need to approach, to withdraw, to aggress etc. In other words, we would do well not to forget that we "predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it" (Wittgenstein, 1953/1986: 46) and henceforth thematize this constitutive 'input device', the human participation, when trying to say something specific to video games. In fact, it is all the more worthwhile to hold on with greater tenacity on our part to this dynamic defining point of video games, this point of intersection where we can begin to see why video games are calligraphic case of human doing (*doing* as in gr. *poiein*, and as in gr. *drama*, action, act, making-something-be).

Given that calligraphy disorients the logical and the legible, while entering the abstract visual experience, whereas video games formally rely on code and algorithms, it might be fairly strange to think of video games as calligraphic. The endeavor to relate them might even seem dangerously tangential – if not asymptotic – between (il-)legibility and the image, scriptoriums and console rooms, and expressive completion of a literary text and

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[2] *Hence, the 'immeasurable' is thought in reference to psychological (qualitative) 'values' being quantified, i.e. related to numerical values (in other words, problems with quantification of all factors and relationships in proper scale). It coheres with the region of indeterminacy (problems with identification of all factors relevant to evaluation and relationships between them, which is not by default solved by analyzing cause and effect relations between given changes) and with incommensurability, a topic from philosophy of science which goes beyond the scope of this paper (see for instance, Bueno, 2007; or Azzouni, 1997), for it can begin with mathematics in Ancient Greece and end – or begin anew – with debates as different as value incommensurability in ethics or why with Cantor mathematics was forced to conceptually readjust to the notion that even infinity comes in different orders.*

[3] *Obviously, the seeming 'universality' of this claim on what proper psychological approach means, is a personal preference. In particular, it draws from gestalt psychotherapy theory which – to put it shortly – has much more to it than a phenomenological 'revision' of psychoanalytical theory.*

gaming. But the issue here is not some analogous argument about video games, which strangely purports to claim universality. Evidently, the 'proportion' of participation of video games and calligraphy into a shared logic (the relation which the two share according to logic; gr. *analogia*, cf. Dokler, 1915) does not pertain to strict logic at all. Rather, it is the immeasurable specificity of the situated practice which generates the same question 'is this an image or is this a text', and to which they both answer: it is a 'fastened space' (gr. *haptō*, I fasten, contact, touch). Fastened to what? Fastened to language and imagination as two positive[4] conditions for the human subject and fastened to the human gesture either literally, the handheld expressive 'link', or synecdochically, the anthropological 'third'.

In what sense or why introduce an anthropological 'third'? Because ultimately it is what we do that equally defines us in terms of our human nature. Just like sexuality exceeds, eludes, or slips by the framework of hetero-normativity, the human gesture (either literal, or taken as a synecdoche for human doing) is the point where language and imagination are potentially or *de facto* displaced, queered, undone, defined, reaffirmed, negated, or repurposed. And this obviously has poetic and political side to it, for gaming is certainly not deprived of power, nor is it conducive to a 'romanticizing' approach. Consider for a moment the fact that we also *do* things with *words* through our speech acts, as insightfully argued by John Austin (1990) already in the mid 20th century. Namely, "I open this meeting" suffices for the whole subsequent interaction to be taken as 'a meeting', just as "I now pronounce you for man and wife" for the rest of your life, or so they say. Contrary to speech acts (which are in fact dependent on very specific conditions to be performative, i.e. they narrow down the creative linguistic plurality), video games *are* as long as they are gamed. They are themselves virtually mediated *language*. The gamer needs to 'meet' the video game (de) sign or *fail* to a various degree, because the story and the game-play is not *a given*. Put differently, the way this is gamed and by who it is gamed defines to a certain point the game-play as such, its depth, educative gain, repetitiveness, richness, conservatism, and subsequently turns video games into a site for identity, différence, learning, spoofing, violence, pleasure, or incredible dullness. Given that usually the term 'third' is used to denote 'other' (genders), for it disturbs Western heteronormativity, the 'norm' of the gestural as an anthropological 'third' (hence, the defining parameter of video games in their dynamic dimension of human act/making/doing), is *kallos grapho* in a (relational, engaging) sense of giving emotional and dynamic expressiveness to the sign. Whence their formal political potential, inscribed in the immeasurable of human making/doing as co-creating the 'given', as a

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[4] *Positive not in axiological terms, but ontologically.*

process on boundary as such, as making a mark which is also inherently aesthetic, even if only by the act of becoming affordable to the senses (*aesthesis* proper).

In other words, the gestural as the anthropological 'third' testifies to an aesthetic, dynamically semiotic, and potentially political dimension, just as the literal aspect of the human gesture, the handheld link of language and imagination testifies to the literal tactile pleasure itself as an entry point to the (de)sign of video games. There are many video games which are controlled through keypad and mouse because the PC remains an important platform for online games (and let us not forget, it is much easier to pirate PC games than console games), but gamepads are also available for personal computers and there is a growing number of handheld video games (see also Kirkpatrick, 2009). Current video games enhance the sense of immersion/presence through the new media based on the science of applying tactile sensation to human interaction with computers, haptics. Needless to say, haptic technology has wide range of application, from engineering through the medical field, all the way to virtual reality, but the point is that it offers manual interaction with computerized reality and objects in a rather 'natural' way. For instance, the seventh generation console (Wii) detects movement in three dimensions and functions as a pointing device. We cannot overestimate the importance of this change in the very form of player interaction. This design allows users to control the game with physical gestures (not only button-presses). Moreover, the so called *force* feedback devise includes tactile sensors, which measure the force exerted on the interface of the pad.

The profound power however, of either a handwritten sign or a gameplay is not that of offering pleasure (cf. for example Barthes, 1973) or discharging aggression, not even of evoking shapes, as much as it is the embodied power of *rhythm*, of composition and pacing, on which any pleasure and attachment is dependent. In this sense, gaming stands in stark contrast to *apathy*, the 'passive-aggressive' solvent of politics. Video games engage the player and are *kinetic* in a similar manner as the seven 'lively arts' theorized by the culture critic Gilbert Seldes in the mid-twentieth century. This is not to say that video games are free from aesthetic and ethnographic conservatism (in fact, many are banal and predictable), or to deny that video games are radically dissociated from the political arena, while paradoxically being a concurrent part of our democratic malaise. But despite the stereotype related to video gaming of the "immovable static body", even when video games do nothing but celebrate the folly of the human condition, whenever they manage to engage, *move* people emotionally, they come to be something else too, by opening the possibility of what can be termed: taking the particular and bringing it to a universal level.

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And it is the latter because of which in our next section we would need to turn to video games through the case of manga, the Japanese comic art, and be likewise attentive to their specifically dynamic underside.

The suspended ode of tragic subjectivity: video games and manga

Japanese form of art such as manga and anime have long had an evident influence on the design and look of video games. However, it was not until 2009 that New York's first major show dedicated to manga, anime and video games was given. Announced as "three forms of contemporary visual art that exercise a huge influence on an entire generation of American youth"[5], the show arguably offered a fresh insight into "the interdependence of three art forms of the future" (ibid). It is almost impossible to list all video games influenced by manga and anime: *Mobile Suit Gundam: Zeonic Front* (PS2), *Little Nemo the Dream master*, *Bleach Dark Souls*, *First of the North Star*, *Dragon ball Z: Burst limit*, *Jump Ultimate Stars*, *Jojos: Bizarre adventures*, *Astro Boy Omega Factor*, *Un Squadron*, *Zillion*, *Cliffhanger*, *Final Fantasy*, *Ghost in the Shell*. If not directly based on manga, many video games are full with anime stylized characters and it is not negligible that large number of MMOGs (massively multiplayer online games), use fantasy settings and focus on player characters advancing from level to level (e.g. *Lineage: The Bloodpledge*, but specially *Ragnarok Online*, *Lineage II*; *The Chaotic Croni-cle*, etc.).

On a most overt level, the link between manga, video games and anime is necessarily a link between video games and cinema, specifically the Hollywood industry. And this is not to refer to the ridiculous or uninformed treatment movies and TV shows give to video games even today, but to the video games industry rising as a major force of change in the film industry itself. In fact, it has been recently argued (Russell, 2012) that the nature of storytelling in film has been forever changed by the rise of computer games and their graphics, a topic in its own right. On another level, the influence of manga on video games can be partially accounted for by an argument on technology (say, older games could not be subtle in their animations and needed exaggeration, present in manga, to get their point across) or by argument on wrong corporate market decisions, for example, the strategy of Warner buying Atari 2600 which arguably crushed the US video games industry until Nintendo took up the scene.

Yet another way of understanding this influence would be to anchor our argument in the social-historical context of Japan and to consider what in particular these *whimsical pictures* (as manga is usually translated) offer in

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their own right to video games. If, by definition, they are lightly fanciful, bouncy and impish, odd, erratic in degree of unpredictability, capricious, what is their whim and playful quaintness about? Furthermore, should we neglect the fact that historically they are linked to Japanese woodblock prints of the 'Floating World culture', the so called *ukiyo-e* (a term homophonic to Sorrowful World), developed in the famously decadent Yoshiwara red-light district of Edo? Equally, should we not consider that the Japanese literature, arts and ethics is intimately bound to a martial tradition? Understanding this incredible mixture of erotic and warring fantasy is therefore crucial for understanding what manga and anime bring into video games, not only in terms of aesthetics, but in terms of *values* and world-view. So, let us expand on this point.

Terminologically, the Japanese martial tradition and the way of the warrior bring together in a telling and profuse way both the *martial* and the *literate*. Namely, *bu* consists of *bun* which stands for literature or letters, and generally the arts of peace. It translates as *subduing the weapon* (Wilson, 1982). Furthermore, *shi* stands for any person who learns their craft through doing, through a process which demands high dedication and resoluteness. On one hand, it is known that the Samurai were 'domesticated' by shoguns and forced to either serve their lords, or give up their swords and farm, which ultimately transformed them from warriors into a hereditary class of bureaucrats. On the other hand, it seems that the societal need to reintegrate values of loyalty, strength, self-control, humility (some of the key Samurai values) was emphasized after the Second World War in the value-deprived postwar era, precisely the time when manga influentially stepped in beyond comedy and juvenile storylines with *gekiga*, drama pictures. Furthermore, manga is historically related to Buddhist scrolls used often for focused contemplation, and with the unique art of ukiyo-e, *the pictures of the floating world* (Ito, 2005), which originated in the red-light district of Edo (Tokyo). These Japanese woodblock prints popularized, satirized and stylized both the pleasures of traditional theater and of high-class brothels. We cannot but notice that today both beauty and blood splatters are equally *stylized* in manga. In fact, when the Japanese government was forced to open its ports to the West in the mid 19th century (cf. detailed review in Brenner, 2007), Japanese artists got familiar with the relatively new and London based *Punch* (cartoon caricature) magazine, but the simplicity and style originating from 12th century Buddhist scrolls and 17th century *ukyio-e* evidently was not abandoned, and illustrations kept a strong sense of individuality to each manga series in accord with the artist's own imagination.

Therefore, in its most basic, manga is complex visual *literacy*. It is about visual cues, implied meanings, long story arc, subtle pacing, shades of emotion and character shifts which emphasize almost everything. Having the

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form of *comic art*, the sequential narrative with character development specific to manga offers a story in the best sense of the word, a dramatic model. Curiously, the type of manga usually transposed in video games is a mix of the previously mentioned historical, artistic and cultural trajectories (e.g. the titles are usually supernatural adventures, science fiction, and historical or brutal action drama). Events and actions have (often than not irrevocable) consequences, characters are humane and consistent and 'face' their demons. The boundary between 'good' and 'evil' is depicted as thin and permeable, for the source of life resides in both the dark and the light, and the context is more that of re-reading the ambiguity in the 'bond' between humans – as always already defined by or through their community – and in the human undoing of nature, the world, or the 'Forces'. The meanings are not straightforward and explicit, but left to be *felt* and inferred in the context. Often, the plot is driven by various grunts, silence, tone of voice, or solitary, meager facial expressions. There is wit, exaggeration and there is unspoken supplication. Strangely enough, by evoking child-like and sometimes frozen faces (which can be taken to operate as 'masking without masks'), manga and anime *structurally* bring some elements of what can be named *tragic subjectivity* into the world of video gaming. The point here is not to interpret with a Western load a genuine Far East art form, but to emphasize that the obvious *particularity* of manga is not only to thematize, as if inversely, 'adult' topics with child-looking characters, but to offer intimation of force and composition in a somewhat suspended manner against the backdrop of our verbally oriented culture. Or as the film-director Mamoru Oshii says[6] about the making of the anime *Ghost in the Shell 2* "[...] half the film is made by sounds, you must recognize that and start thinking from there." Also, the intention with the syntagma 'tragic subjectivity' is not to refer elliptically to Freud's notion of 'tragic guilt' (cf. *Totem and Taboo*), even though it can be read as standing in peculiar relation to it. According to Freud, "[guilt][...] consisted of a rebellion against a divine or human authority" (Freud, 1919: 256), whereas tragic subjectivity, as defined in this paper is *constitutive* of either divine or human authority, in making it or dismissing it, but we go back to this later.

Manga's messages are not rendered through words, but through plaintive, toxic showing and doing. In this sense, video games enact a dramatic narrative without too much slobber and/or self-conscious verbal rumble. There is even more to it and has direct relevance as to why violence is then again and again revoked as pleasurable in video games: not so much because the player can safely tap into the primordial pool of raw potency without suppressing it, but because the latter's 'translation' to blood and aggression is

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6 *Retrieved 31 May, 2013, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egRAxn8DiQc*

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done in a specific manner: with pacing, strong focus and immersion which arise from the very development and composition of events that make the whole of game-drama (finding your way out of a prison cell, rescuing your tribe, fighting for tradition and the Samurai way, discovering the truth about initial violent event-trigger etc.) possible in the first place. Hence, if we are also reminded that according to Aristotle the essence of tragedy is found not in the so called theory of *catharsis*, but in the *composition of events* (pragmáton sýstasin) which deeply affects you in a contemplative stretch[7], then we see the potential 'danger' video games evoke by having manga (de) sign. Given their structure, they all too well *humanize* video games, even in the cool of android and machines-dominated future, where the textured poetics of the hand is lost.

However, video games evoke the struggle between cooperation and bloodshed, justice and punishment, tirelessly. They remind us of our own dithering between the bloody regression of violence and feeble priding on the act of surrendering power for bits of peace or justice. To use the plot from *Ghost in the Shell 2* as a Nemesis metaphor: in a world where it feels exactly as if the gynoid has mysteriously killed its owner, it is much easier to define ourselves by our own image (in line with Oshii, human history can be seen as a relentless gesture of 'making ourselves-and others-puppets', but human history is certainly more than that), than to give due (gr. *némein*) to the defining, structural importance of human doing, whether it translates as a tenacious drive for identification or annihilation or as a political action. In fact, video games attest the importance of the gestural in our secular society and democratic arena (in the latter, usually as a lack of political demands and consistent, relentless action). The possibility to soothe and appease the 'furies' through a game-play, the furies which the great *tragodos* 'integrated' into the *polis*, is truly banal within the political horizon which does not need metaphysics or aesthetics to act[8] thoughtfully.

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[7] *Making this particular point is based on the Macedonian language translation of Aristotle's Poetics by Mihail D. Petruševski, whose major argument was introduced in 1948. Petruševski calls attention to pragmáton sýstasin and to various sections in Poetics where Aristotle repeatedly speaks about 'composition of events', which he also names mythos, as the soul of tragedy, its telos (see 1450b2). Hence, the conclusion "[...] ta hipoteza Poetiko osiromaši za enega njenih najmočnejših, najbolj odmevnih izrazov, ta izraz pa pripisuje anonimnemu prepisovlacu, ki bi bil – v tem primeru – genialnejši kot sam Aristoteles" (Gantar, 1982: 34) is possible only from a point of view which already strongly favors catharsis, a position evocative maybe of our failure to contain the 'tragic' without 'discharging it', but is not our focus here. Compare also the very important 13th and 14th chapter of Poetics where Aristotle addresses the final part of his definition by commenting what is the tragic effect and how it is achieved, where the terms eleos and phobos are directly explained by relating them with 'sýstasis ton pragmáton' (cf. Petruševski, 1954).*

[8] *This is simply to emphasize that 'violence ends when(-ever) we end it', given that no gods will symbolically end the vicious circle of revenge and no theory will magically turn into change. It does not imply 'reading' Aeschylus's Oresteia in line with René Girard's scapegoating theory (cf. Girard, 2004). Moreover, before prophetically 'deconstructing' the Romantic lie by announcing that desire is always oriented by the*

Manga luridly epitomizes the individual only as a *link* in the chain of the generations, therefore it ultimately epitomizes the unbound force of life, which rests in death (in case the reader prefers a depressive gynoid anime metaphor: the robot designed to provide pleasure to humans, attempts suicide by clawing its own synthetic skin). The gamer can become part of the (gr.) *dithurambos* and sing his or her way into and out of the circular video game dancing through joy, passion, fear, anger, revenge. This is why translating the structure offered in manga as a form of art into video gaming is essentially aesthetic. Even if it does not provoke a sense of insight or a sense of making something new, it can provoke a sense of *good form*. However, *tragic subjectivity* (restaged to a various degree of complexity and success through manga in video games) is neither about aestheticizing reality, nor about the ambivalence which Freud sees as the most basic phenomenon of our emotional life, even if originally foreign to the latter (Freud, 1919: 197). Rather, it is about the *act* by which the domain of the individual bursts into fragments in order to be re-inscribed as part of something other than oneself (which can be outright political, not 'only' intimate). Therefore, it is as much about our loyalty to virtues and attachment to beauty (both intersecting in the way we self-limit ourselves), as it is about possible (self-)destruction, since human doing is not exempt from the latter as well.

For eventually, to live as a human does not mean to leave the shadows and uncertainties of the many turns which ever-again might bring us to dead-ends, but to bear the *open passage*, individually and collectively, between the shadows of *physis* and *nomos*[9]. If not for any other reason, then at least because the two are consubstantial in constituting us *as* human/ity, whence and thence we are marked by alterity.

If we agree with Freud that originally art did not serve to please (the pleasure principle) but to *conjure*, it is this unacknowledged power of the open passage between *physis* and *nomos* that is fully occasioned in video gaming and which additionally infuses paradoxical alienation and addiction, attraction and repulsion in gamers and non-gamers alike. True, the unacknowledged power of the open passage, of this incident of *human* life which unifies pleasure with the 'standing-for-something-else' (e.g. our possibility to manifest what was first only imagined, to destroy or create anew, the whole 'as if' realm or the pleasure we find in 'wonder', and finally, interrogation

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presence of a model, Girard would do well to remind himself that already the meaning of a word is first and foremost the meaning given to it by others, and yet this does not make all of us everywhere only primordial conflict and an all-present (structural) power of the scapegoating process.

    [9] *Given that nomos aims at political equitability and does not appear before the end of 6th century BC (fully codified with Cleisthenes reforms), it should be noted that here the use of nomos serves to indicate more sharply logos as a condition for collectivity (whereas for the pre-Socratics logos was more a form of natural ordering and was not yet delineated from physis).*

that opens up the field of contention either personally or politically) might seem too primitive and too powerful to be of use – and not misuse or abuse – in the current world we have come to share. Perhaps, it demands a great deal of the (post)modern *anthropos*, who weakened by the noise of guilt and image waits, again and again, a better time, a new place, to be free (just imagine the effort to avoid the dread of choices and actions made with no 'guaranty'). And this is where the political underside of video games comes to the fore in an upgraded *dehumanizing* 'version': in a de-ritualized, unlimited profit-centered society, collective myths must be *sold*, the field of contention and crisis (gr. *crisis* as discernment, judgment, decision, which necessarily evokes accountability) dismissed, and one is finally 'free' to choose, what else but of course, the ways of increasing one's enjoyment, privately.

Unlike the division we find at our corner of the civilization where comic art is for children and tragedy for adults, Japanese comic art can be, and is, read by young and old (despite its many 'genres' there are numerous cross-over readers). Moreover, the compelling and alluring manga characters of women dressed in skintight body suits are a powerful axis through which video games are indexing, both diachronically and synchronically, the impotent, malodorous overemphasis on theory as very reflective of our culture – a palimpsest of Cartesian dualism which has been present for centuries, and which combines well with the fact that at least since Plato we have been suspicious of the body. It is known that manga and anime thematize the female archetype of a more-than-or-not-really human being, grounded in the enjoyable image of the female physicality. In manga, depictions of violence and sexuality are not prevented or self-censored from a long history of Christian tradition which blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality. The fantasy, whether sexual, violent or playful, is freely depicted and there for you to emotionally digest it as an adult (which is to say, to recognize it *as* a fantasy). This is perhaps another reason why owning the free passage between *physis* and *nomos* eludes our liking: it demands not 'acting out', but rather choosing in what direction to act. Incest, intolerance, rape, murder, destruction, no devil or nature 'made us do it'.

But, we obviously have a rather *syncopal* manner of reminding ourselves, if at all, that the free passage between *physis* and *nomos* does not need to be covered with blood (symbolically or actually), if only our deeds rise to the challenge of *auto-nomos* (to which both politics and philosophy are committed). The latter does not support the smooth running of the profit-driven ideology. The reason is likely to be found in the fact that the promise of *auto-nomos*, the restaging of this profoundly democratic possibility of knowing ourselves – individually and collectively – as the origin of the laws we live by, is not the self-contained 'individuum' or any model of a self-enlightened puppet, but self-limitation, incessant interrogation and

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full acknowledgment, imminently, of our mortality, acknowledgement of the impossibility to transcend death. Our 'trouble' therefore is not how to divide, but how to unify, to patiently weave the power of relating that trespasses mere interests, which is not a job for warriors who cannot give up their sword since they feel safe only at the battlefield, but for those who are eager to learn diligently what it means to subdue the weapon.

Conclusion

Let us then close this paper with few lines in the spirit of rhythm, plurality, manga and the calligraphic immeasurable gaming-*act* of making-something-be by giving emotional expressiveness to the sign.

We can be rightly amused when someone makes a distinction between video gaming as an imagined way of contacting the world as opposed to the non-imagined, realist way, which arguably is not *illusio*, (lat.) 'in play'. The reader, who sees video games as nothing but a diluted entertainment, will be fairly perplexed by the position of this paper. More often than not, video games are truly experienced as nothing but entertainment. However, by the very fact that video games are broadly accessible and translate certain values into virtually mediated action, their (personal, social, political) potential and importance cannot be overemphasized. Even less so, if in contrast to our laws we see them as yet another way of frameworking social-historical memory, values, and visions.

In a (hyper-realistic) sense, the image and the message video games project "is closer than it appears" to ourselves in the dark corridors of human doing and tragic subjectivity. Video games 'capitalize' on the condition which makes them possible in the first places: sold for entertainment, repurposed for privatization (and hence, depoliticization), the unacknowledged response-*ability* in any human act which engages a world is diminished. Forget, as much as you can that you are truly, not virtually, finite. Forget that reclaiming political autonomy is a historical privilege and not a given, and that interrogating our own laws as a relentless act of self-alteration goes hand in hand with dancing, dancing to the bounty of life *because of*, not in spite of, our finitude and choice to self-limit. Without dismissing the reality of deep scars we carry individually and collectively and which we try to hide even from ourselves, perhaps it is time for us to be sited as clouds next to the glorious sun, and learn of the warm dance which burned heroes' lives willed for what could be, rather than what is. So that we learn what cannot be spoken, for it is the final limit which, while bringing about a profound loss, connects us in new ways with the living *and* the dead. So that even in the night of our depths, it is our deeds that speak their own stories full with fresh scent of flowers brought to life by the daily fight with

unnamable dragons tamed silently by an open heart. For how can we not love this life that keeps us hanging on a thin thread of wonder we have not come to understand, and the silence we have not yet come to share?

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