Can we make true statements about the world through videogames? An indirect realist account of Alexander Galloway's notion of social realism in gaming

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Abstract

In recent years, game-related scholars have claimed that the study of videogames can reveal important insights for understanding and challenging the concept of realism advocated by previous theories of visual culture. In fact, videogames have increasingly been acknowledged as a valuable site for opening up new ways of interrogating traditional theories of realism. Drawing upon Alexander Galloway's seminal work *Social realism in gaming,* the argument we seek to advance here is that: his theorizations of social realism in gaming alongside the notion of "congruence requirement" are largely grounded on indirect realist assumptions. In order to provide support to our claim, we assumed that his theory of realism is suggestive of an indirect form of correspondence between the fidelity of gamers' ordinary world, their derivative actions within the gaming-world and the modes of representation of objective reality depicted in videogames.

Keywords

Videogames. Alexander Galloway. Social Realism. Indirect Realism.

1 Introdução

In recent years, gaming scholars have increasingly acknowledged videogames as a valuable site for opening up new ways of interrogating the concept of realism in previous theories of visual culture (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009; Crawford, 1984; Galloway, 2006; Karhulahti, 2012; Low, 2001). Drawing upon Alexander Galloway's seminal work Social realism in gaming, the argument we seek to advance here is that his conceptualization of social realism (hereafter SR) in gaming presupposes a kind of indirect realism (henceforth IR). The article argues that Galloway's SR alongside his notion of "congruence requirement" are largely centred on indirect realist assumptions.

When realism is discussed in relation to videogames, it most often refers to the "problematic of representation", that is, the level of correspondence between how a gaming-world looks, sounds or behaves and how the mundane world is experienced by gamers in their perception (Egenfeldt-Nielsen; Smith; Tosca, 2008; Martin, 2016). The concerns on such a problematic seem to be a point of convergence in the literature on realism in gaming. The very notion of representation in videogame-related studies is beset by controversies. On the one hand, visual and textual representations of meaning in games stand apart from the reality in a separate semantic zone (Crawford, 1984; Galloway, 2004). This means that gaming representations are nothing more than a distorted, misrepresentation of the real world at best. The truth of representation in videogames is permanently revealed in an imperfect way, as a "shadow of reality".

On the other hand, representation is mainly regarded as mimesis – an interest in the "realisticness" of a game (Galloway, 2004). The deployment of realism is therefore attained in so far as these representations of meaning in games are a faithful, mimetic mirror of particular aspects of reality (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009). According to this account, videogames have the potential to offer an unmediated truth about the real world (Galloway, 2006). Realism in videogames is deployed by appealing to an "authentic", mimetic visual and textual representations of the real world (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009). As a result, these technologies have rendered to videogames the ontological status of appearing to be more cognitively "realistic", at least in gamers' mind (Payne, 2012).

Contra both sides of this debate, Galloway's (2004; 2006) work puts forward an unorthodox account on realism in gaming. In his view, the approaches to realism in videogames grounded on previous theories of visual culture are insufficient to cope with the

full spectrum of issues at play in gaming. As Galloway (2006) puts it, videogames have overcome such a debate with the phenomenon of action. Given that the primarily phenomenological reality of videogames is that of action, Galloway (2006) develops his own theory of realism in appealing to a conceptualization of SR in gaming. According to him, SR refers to the extent to which a game's story or theme corresponds to the everyday lived experience of its players. He argues that a theory of realism in gaming must focus on the congruence between modes of representation and the social context known and lived by gamers. In his view, videogames produce a sort of "protorealism" (i.e., realism mainly based on action) that hold potential to unpack the critical potential of realism in gaming.

Here I support Galloway's theory of SR in gaming and, in particular, its emphasis on the importance of mode of representation and the everyday in videogames. Notwithstanding, this paper develops Galloway's discussion by claiming that videogames are a perceptual intermediary which mediates our perception of the external world. The representations in videogames presents therefore a group sense-data, as the indirect realists would say, from which we can indirectly access the reality. If so, SR should not be conceived as Galloway suggests as a true realism from which we can arrive at true, absolute statement and beliefs about the external world. Instead, if truth is regarded as "indirect correspondence", the experience of perceiving the gaming reality is mediated by sense-data whose sensations cause by them can only offer a certain point of view of the reality conveniently carried out. In what follows, the realism in videogames in not a matter of having experiences of gameplay which more faithfully represents the way things are in the world.

2 A brief notion of indirect realism

Over the last century onward, different philosophies of perception have tried explaining how human perception works and thereby how it influences our beliefs and knowledge about reality (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009). In particular, philosophers have looked extensively over what makes one human experience more realistic than another. In the pursuit for answers, they have put forward different models of rationality to explain the extent to which: we can really rely upon our perceptual apparatus to provide reliable knowledge about the external world (Sayer, 2000). There is a presumed belief that human perception is fallible. The inherent precariousness of our sensory apparatus deliberatively

misleads or confuses us so as to we are not able to make any accurate conclusions or judgments about the world (Sayer, 2000). At a more epistemological level, philosophers have enquired if and, if so, how we can have privileged access to the Truth in light of the evident fallibility of our knowledge (Sayer, 2000). What is at stake here is "[...] the ancient philosophical distinction between appearance and reality [...]" (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009, p. 22).

At the very heart of such a distinction lies the problem of representation (Wheeler, 2010). For Cummins (1991), representation is any physical object or state that is somehow made to stand-in for some other physical object or state. Representation does play a significant role in human activities, particularly, the ways people interpret and give meaning to the world (Schwartz, 1984). Wheeler (2010) claims that we most often engage in representational explanations about the world by invoking internal states, deeply influenced by our worldview, with content that encode meaning or bear information about the reality. In that sense, we use representational systems as a symbolic function to "think of a mark, gesture, idea, or state of mind" that is capable of describing, denoting, referring, or representing the world (Schwartz, 1984, p. 1051). Our representational system allows us to take the world to be a certain, and mostly incorrect, way. Even if we accept the premise that there is a reality outside of what our senses can perceive, we cannot accurately detect it. Indeed, we can only perceive the world through our senses, which, most often, deceive us at certain points about what reality is (Wheeler, 2010).

In the eyes of many philosophers, the nature of representation itself is regarded as problematic (Wheeler, 2010). The problem of representation is, then, the problem of defining the relation between representations (i.e., the world of appearances) and the things they are said to represent (i.e., the real world) (Cummins, 1991). It concerns, therefore, to the legitimacy of considering certain internal states as real symbols of reality, and so treating them as items that stand undoubtedly for denoting, referring, or representing the real world as it truly is. A common feature found in some philosophies of perception, particularly realism, is "[...] the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it [...]" (Sayer, 2000, p. 2). Certainly, few would readily deny the very existence of the empirical world independent of our thought. We can feel, experience its very existence through our senses. It is real to us in all of its aspects. The world itself is not merely a product or construction of our knowledge, and thereby it exists independently of our words and other signifiers (Sayer, 2000).

When we say the world is real, this is not in order to claim that we have privileged knowledge of it. The independence of the world from our knowledge does not reject the fact that the world exists independently of our knowledge. Instead, it can only state that there is no way whatsoever of guaranteeing the production of true knowledge about the world on the grounds of our peripheral system and discourse (Sayer, 2000). In this regard, the world "therefore cannot be said to exist independently of at least some knowledge" we input onto it (Sayer, 2000, p. 11). At least, in Sayer's view, it seems evident that it is not plausible to know the things as they are in themselves. Indeed, we can only "know" the world is from our immediate experiences. If then, a part-and-parcel of its very existence relies on the way our knowledge, perception conceives it.

That said, the problem of representation is actually operative in the agenda of IR. In short, IR is a philosophical theory of knowledge grounded on the assumption that we can only perceive the external world indirectly (Brown, 2008; Ward, 1976). As Brown (1992) comments on it, our perception is always mediated by a perceptual intermediary that supposedly stands between the perceiver and the external world. When we look at an everyday object, it is not "[...] that object we directly see, but rather, a perceptual intermediary [...]" (O'brien, 2004). In that sense, we never directly engage with the real-world through perception. Instead, for the indirect realist, what we really can directly perceive is a perceptual intermediary via sense data. The notion of sense data, Russell (2012, p. 4) writes, refers to "[...] the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardness, roughness, and so on.". In what follows, Huemer (2011) remarks that sense data are dependent on the mind of the perceiver and so cannot exist unperceived. Since all we directly perceive is sense data, all perception of things is an awareness of "mental images", "ideas", "impressions", "appearances", or "representations" of mind-independent physical objects (HUEMER, 2011). In any act of perception, the immediate object of perception is always a mind-dependent object (Brown, 2008), that is, a sensory representation of the object upon perceiving it (Russell, 2012).

Given that perception of sense data is our primary contact with reality (COGBRUN; SILCOX, 2009), Huemer (2011) observes that sense data hold the properties of the objects that perceptually appear to us in the world. These properties refer to the "qualities we seem to perceive things around us to have" (Huemer, 2011). For the Russellian scholar, sense data are the immaterial properties of the thing we actually perceive in contrast to the real properties of it (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009). In Russell's (2012) account of sense data, the

properties perceived changes accordingly to the relative position of the perceiver and techniques of observation. If this is correct, then the properties we perceive are not the real properties of the objects, but rather, the content of our perceptual experience.

The experience of perceiving sense data is, what Russell (2012) calls, "sensation", that is, the effects caused by the mind-independent objects that we don't actually perceive. Of course, objects cause us to have sensations of sense data that represent an entity in the external world. For Russell (2012), it is the mind that engages in some kind of inferential behaviour regarding sensations of sense data. Moreover, it is the mind that manages to draw conclusions about the properties of the things (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009). This means that we can only infer the corresponding difference or similarity of the relation between physical objects that cause the sense data by knowing the very same relation between sense data. As a result, sensations impact upon our immediate knowledge of differences and similarities amongst sense data (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009).

At this point, it is worth shedding some light on the following question: how can we have knowledge of anything other than sense data if we only directly perceive sense data? According to IR, says Brown (1992; 2008), perception is not only casually but also epistemically triadic. As he writes, "[...]our knowledge of external arrangements is based on evidence provided by perceptual displays." mediated by "[...] epistemic intermediaries that block our ability to learn about external items [...]" (Brown, 2008, p. 54). In light of this, how can we arrive at true statements and beliefs about the external world, if truth is regarded as indirect correspondence? As long as the only thing we can directly perceive is sense data, the indirect realist invokes the methodological presupposition of the "veil of perception" to explain the relation between the mind and the world. Sense data, as Silins (2011) remarks, interpose themselves between us and the mind-independent objects in the external world. If this is correct, then "All we actually perceive is the veil that covers the world, a veil that consists of our sense data." (O'brien, 2004, n.p). Indeed, for the indirect realist, the veil is a kind of barrier that prevent us to achieve first-hand knowledge about the external world exactly because it cuts us off from any direct perceptual access to that world (Brown, 1992). Under the aegis of the veil, O'Brien (2004) stresses that we are unsure if the object we are looking at really exists, because there is no direct objective proof of its very existence.

In what follows, indirect realist theories are often accused of losing that most basic fact of perception, that is, its openness to the external world beyond. This strong objection brings forth the concern on what, then, justifies our perceptual beliefs about the existence of

a world beyond the confines of the "veil of perception". On the one hand, there may not actually exist any of the mind-independent objects we normally take ourselves to be perceiving in the world. There is merely sense data in our mind (Silins, 2011). On the other hand, mind-independent objects may not always be the way that they appear to be through perception. In both cases, all perceptual beliefs we have about the real-world may be regarded as false. If so, our perceptual, cognitive and epistemic access to the real-world is rendered as deeply problematic if not impossible (Crane; French, 2017).

On this basis, there has been arguably room for raising some scepticism on the veracity of our perceptual beliefs about the external world. In response to this, the indirect realists claim that sense-data are "just" the medium by which we can perceive the mind-independent world. As a medium, sense-data cannot create a "veil of perception" (Crane; French, 2017). When we use words to talk about, refer to, or represent things, we create in fact a "veil of words" between us and the things in the world (Silins, 2011). In the impossibility of directly access the world, the question that remains for the indirect realists is: how can we say that one perceptual experience whatsoever is more realistic than any other? IR rejects the relativist ethical view that "[...] nobody's perceptions are any more realistic than anybody else's [...]" perceptions (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009, p. 28). Although the indirect realist accepts the premise that anyone is entitled to have his own opinion, this does not necessarily mean that every opinion is to be held as equally true or warranted by its evidence. As a result, truth is not a thing relative to whatever a person, a group of people, or the majority of the people believe is true merely by virtue of believing in it (Cogbrun; Silcox, 2009).

In this regard, Ayer's (1953) epistemological position on perception address the matter on how one group of sense data is more realistic than another group. He elaborates on the idea of "the privileged sense-data" to elucidate which preferential conditions make a perception more realistic than another one. In conjunction with this, Ayer (1953) also explains why certain conditions should be select as preferential. The privileged sense-data, as Ayer (1953) remarks, refer to those groups of data which present the "real qualities" of material things. According to him, a quality is regarded as the real quality of a material thing when it characterizes those elements of the thing which are experienced from a certain point of view that possess qualities of the kind in question most conveniently carried out.

The most realistic perceptual experience is, therefore, the one that is most similar to one or more preferential conditions of certain sequence of sense-data. The relations of

quality, or position, obtained from our experiences between privileged elements of a material thing works as reference, knowledge of the general features of the thing. Of course, as Ayer (1953) says, the choice of the preferential conditions may not be the same for every kind of material thing. There are occasions where a sense-datum of the same quality may not faithfully represent the real character of the material thing, which is constituted by the group to which it belongs. He asserts that the distinction between sense-data depends on a difference in their relations, rather than in their intrinsic qualities. If so, the real character of the relevant material thing is unveiled by "[...] the special relationship in which a sense-datum must stand to other sense-data [...]" (Ayer, 1953, p. 259). At least in Ayer's understanding of sense-data, this does not imply that there is no general rule governing our giving preference to a set of sense-data which is the most reliable in the foregoing sense. We often conceive a certain set of sense-datum as the standard members of their groups from which the others systematically deviate. These standard members the group in question are used as reference to determine the real characteristics of the material thing, as opposed to its merely appearance.

3 Alexander Galloway's account of social realism in videogames

Galloway (2006) outlines a rather compelling case for the debate on (social) realism in videogames. To put it simply, he expands the concept of realism beyond its confines within the traditional theories to include the novel challenges that games present. According to him, gaming scholarly should not turn to a theory of realism as a mere realistic, mirroring representation of the objective reality (Galloway, 2004). In doing so, game theorists ought to depart from the traditional accounts of realism typically perpetuated in both realism in narrative and realism in images. In contrast to traditional forms of visual arts that represent reality in a static way, videogames are an active medium (Aarseth, 1997) whose primarily phenomenological reality is that of action (Galloway, 2006). If so, a theory of realism in gaming have to take into account the phenomenon of action and some kind of congruence with the social context known and lived by gamers (Galloway, 2004). To put it differently, Galloway (2006) believes that videogames produce a form of "protorealism" based on realism in action and what he calls the "congruence requirement". His opening statement is that, like traditional theories of visual culture, the central theoretical issue on realism in gaming is generally referred to as the "problematic of representation". Representation, as he

locates it in this debate, refers to the creation of meaning about the objective reality through images, texts, or generally speaking, language.

At the very heart of Galloway's (2006) account of realism in gaming, there is a clear concern on how and in what way one can produce true statements about reality on the basis of representations in videogames. If it is correct to claim that truths are provided by such representations, then one is able to put forward true statements about reality and its facts, on the basis on what that reality itself seems to be like. If not, the representations of reality in videogames has no connection whatsoever with the reality in the external world. Therefore, no true statement can be done. Drawing upon theories of visual culture, Galloway (2004) includes a discussion of the "problematic of representation" in terms of whether or not meaning is created through visual or textual representation. For videogames, he says, this debate is encapsulated in terms of two disparate arguments: if images are either a faithful imitation of reality or they are fictional, thereby standing apart from the world in a separate semantic zone.

In the first argument, as he writes, "[...] images (or language, or what have you) are a faithful, mimetic mirror of reality thereby offering some unmediated truth about the world [...]" (Galloway, 2006, p. 71). This involves an assumption that a direct correspondence between the mode of representation in videogames and objective reality can be established and revealed. Hence, representation is merely imitative of the natural order observed in the outside world. The modes of representation in gaming would promote the acquisition of a purely, unmediated truth about the nature of reality that exists in the world. If this is correct, then, the deployment of realism in videogames is attained in so far as they offer representations of reality as transparent and direct as possible in order to allow these representations to contain an accurate truth about the world. It is the act of looking that otherwise uphold the "realistic" character of such representations in visual arts (Galloway, 2006).

The second argument, as Galloway (2006, p. 71) says, makes reference to the belief that "[...] images are a separate, constructed medium thereby standing apart from the world in a separate semantic zone.". The basic premise here is that: there is a gap between the world and its representation in videogames rather than an inherent relationship amongst the two of them. Representation of reality in videogames is always distorted, that is, gaming images are nothing more than a misrepresentation of the objective world at best. Videogames reveal the truth of representation in an imperfect way. This belief provides an

elemental problem, that of it becomes practically impossible to make true statements about the world from the representations of reality in games. Nonetheless, the fact that games belong to a semantic domain distinct from the mundane world does not imply that they are not whatsoever important to one's ordinary experience. Indeed, Galloway (2006) indicates that videogames have the potential to provide the means by which gamers might form an understanding of reality that exists out there.

Although videogames have inherited this same debate on realism perpetuated by theories visual culture, Galloway (2006, p. 71) asserts that the notion of visual and textual representation of meaning "[...]does not account for the full spectrum of issues at play." in gaming. As he puts it, videogames have supplemented such a debate with the phenomenon of action. In gaming, game theorists must talk about realism in action (Galloway, 2006). In contrast to visual arts which are merely watched, videogames are played. Indeed, videogames compel gamers to perform acts (e.g., press a button) in order to deploy its realism.

The fact that videogames are based on actions instead of images per se poses a quite different problematic on the debate of realism. As long as the question of action is key to the deployment of realism in games, Galloway (2004) asserts that it is no longer sufficient to talk about the visual or textual representation of meaning in gaming. Instead, game scholarly has to approach realism in gaming in terms of "[...] actions, and the physical or game worlds in which they transpire." (Galloway, 2006 p. 71-72). In videogames, realism is not simply deployed by appealing to mimesis or realistic depiction of real world. Realism in gaming is about the "correspondence" between the fidelity of action and image, of motion and outcome instead (Galloway, 2006).

This does not mean that Galloway (2004) rejects the perception of the graphical quality of videogames as the most direct and cognitively closest route one has to feel how "authentic" the reality of a game-world seems to be (LOW, 2001). The perception of games' photorealism assumes an important function in turning the old adage of "seeing is believing" possible in videogames. Of course, Galloway (2006) acknowledges the fact that realism in videogames needs the perception to be achieved. Nonetheless, if we are right, what he claims is something more radical: it is utterly flawed the idea that perception (and the act of looking, in particular) alone is sufficient to lead one to feel the representations of the external world in videogames as "real" as possible. To put it differently, the perception of the graphics looks as simply a passive reception of visual stimuli is not a sufficient condition

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to make gamers believe that a game-world is, in fact, a truly representation of the "mundane world".

The idea of perception as requiring action is, for Galloway (2006), not only very appealing to approach realism in videogames but also a necessary component to find it in gaming. As he suggests, the need for action is pivotal to perceive objects in videogames. In gaming, Galloway (2004) remarks, it is through interaction that the game-world and its objects appear to gamers as immediately existing like in the external world. If so, for Galloway (2006), the ontological status of objects and their representations within games are recognized through action. The bottom line is: videogames always require some sort of constant physical input by gamers (Aarseth, 1997) to interact with and within the game-world, whether manipulating the controller, moving the whole body to control the game, or using voice command, for instance (Galloway, 2006). The experience of a 'realistic' gameplay is possible and thereby enhanced by the use and combination of such props and peripherals. The physical actions a gamer performs represent videogames' kinesthetic elements (Karhulahti, 2013). Gameplay is typically characterized by a kinesthetic language. To put it simply, kinesthetic language entails challenges of hybrid physical-cognitive nature in videogames (Karhulahti, 2013). In this regard, kinesthetic moments involves mainly gamers' sense of touch and motion within the game-world through peripherals.

These physical actions represent only half of the performance, the other half being actualized in nonkinesthetic elements, moments. In short, a nonkinesthetic language entails challenges of cognitive nature (Karhulahti, 2013). The required nontrivial effort by gamers to overcome a nonkinesthetic challenge is solely cognitive (e.g., privileges skills like think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention). In general, videogames provide these two types of gameplay elements, moments. Play a videogame is, therefore, often an act of negotiating with these two languages, which are responsible for imbricating further the player with the game-world reality (Karhulahti, 2013).

In this regard, realism in videogames needs this "[...] more intimate relationship [of the gamer] with the apparatus itself [...]" (Galloway, 2006 p. 83). Gamers are meaningfully more than a mere, passive audience member whilst playing a videogame. The act of doing is exactly what further imbricates the gamer with the game. It is gamers' interactions with the game-world through peripherals that uphold the sense of realism in gaming (Galloway, 2004). Realism in videogames is not a simply matter of one-sided actions performed by gamers by interacting with and within the world of the game though. In gaming, as

Karhulahti (2013) seems to suggest, realism is conceived at least by the correspondence amongst two sorts of actions: "that of the gamer in the mundane world, and that of the controlled entity or entities in the game world". Certainly, gamers must be actualized in the game-world. This means that they must engage into a game-world which respond to their actions in a very "realistic" manner. As Low (2001, p. 2) claims, gamers cannot perceive a game-world "[...] as being 'real' unless it reacts to [them] in a 'realistic' way.". In conjunction with "realistic" graphics, realism in videogames relies on a game-wold that does offer a similarly realistic interactive world to match the reality of gamers' mundane world. In order to deploy realism in videogames, Galloway (2004) remarks that the gaming world and its controlled entities must respond to gamer's actions as close as possible to those specific activities, events typically found in their social reality. Likewise, gamer's actions in a gaming world ought to have equally effective consequences in that world as ordinary world actions have in the mundane world (Karhulahti, 2013).

In that sense, there must be a certain level of correspondence between gamers' ordinary world and their derivative actions in the gaming-world. Such a correspondence contributes to create this make-believe atmosphere within which gamers feel the game-world and its objects as realistic as possible (Low, 2001). When these two worlds collide against each other, realism in gaming lies deeply on how persuasive the correspondences between their representations of reality are for gamers (Egenfeldt-Nielsen; Smith; Tosca, 2008; King; Krzywinska, 2006). In so far as the representations of reality in a gaming world are somehow congruent with those representations lived by gamers in their mundane world, the ontological status of such worlds is cognitively to be held as equally "real" at least in gamers' brain (Aarseth, 2007; Karhulahti, 2012).

At this point, it becomes understandable why Galloway's account of realism in videogames rejects Aristotle's notion of mimesis in the Poetics in favour of Johan Huizinga's (1950) methectic notion of play. Drawing on Huizinga writings on play, Galloway (2006) suggests that videogames are far from being merely imitative or a make-believe activity build upon mimesis. Games do not seek to emulate the mundane world, and thereby they are not meant to accurately represent reality. Game playing is, therefore, not a literal imitation or reproduction of the natural order observed in an already existing reality (Warner, 2012). Indeed, videogames are elaborated in terms of a methectic component. Play and by extension videogames provide the means for methectic participation, which refers to

gamers' affective-somatically and kinetically actions required to establish their direct participation and contact with the game-world (Warner, 2012).

Similar to other types of methectic play, videogame play maintains its effects impinging outside the boundaries of a game-world. In so doing, gaming refers more to a mode of presentation or enactment than a merely imitative representation per se. In terms of realism, play a videogame provides a window toward the expression of a certain social reality can emerge. For that reason, Galloway (2006) claims that videogames are paradoxically important to comprehend ordinary experience. In light of the discussion so far, it is perfectly understandable why Galloway (2006) suggests that the debate of realism in gaming ought to be concerned with a problematic of "correspondences" rather than just "representation". In his words, thinking about correspondences is "[...] consider the kinetic, affective, and material dimensions in debates around meaning and representation." (Galloway, 2006, p. 72).

In what follows, any endeavour that tries to outline Galloway's conception of SR should start from the epistemological distinction between realisticness and realism. It is an epistemic difference, as Galloway (2006, p. 74) indicates, amongst games that strive for a high level of realisticness (or realistic visual representation) and games that display realism in terms of "[...] real life in all its dirty details [...]". Of course, Galloway (2004) reckons the importance of realisticness at the level of visual representation in gaming, that is, the visual qualities, aspects of games as representations of real life. "Realistic-ness" games aim to be mimetic, mirror reconstructions of the mundane world reality, a thereby is a simply matter of modelling everyday life events through games that are so focused on the realistic visual representation of reality (GALLOWAY, 2006). Notwithstanding, Galloway (2006) argues that no matter how high the polygon counts or dots per inch resolution is in videogames, all realistic games are fantasy at the end. For him, an immeasurable chasm stands between empirical ordinary reality and its representation in realistic games. As a result, the reconstruction of real life in videogames is always deployed through distorted representations of it.

In this regard, the notion of realisticness in videogames, Galloway (2006) stresses, is encapsulated by the following dilemma: if games are really able to capture the "correct" truth of the ordinary world, then realisticness in gaming stands "unmasked as a mere reality- or realism-effect" (JAMESON, 1992, p. 158, grifo do autor). If so, the reality videogames alleged aims to unveil falls at once into the utterly representation and illusion

(Jameson, 1992). In that sense, Galloway (2006) suggests that a viable concept of realism is impossible to be attained in videogames if it is to be grounded on such an understanding of realisticness. The notion of realisticness in gaming cannot cope simultaneously with the demands from the epistemological and aesthetic claims, since the prolongation and preservation of one claim means the ceasing of the other.

In light of the above, Galloway (2006) rejects the realistic representation view in gaming in favour of, what he so eloquently calls, "social realism". The central theoretical tenet of Galloway's (2006, p. 75) account of SR is primarily concerned with the development of "[...] a socialist political practice [...]", rather than simply promoting a single-minded cinema whose main purpose is re-creating the "real". In this regard, he claims that it is possible to assume a critical attitude towards mundane world whilst playing videogames. In fact, as he says, games hold the possibility to raise and thereby enhance critical reflection on social, political and ideological issues of ordinary life without losing their enjoyable experience.

According to Galloway (2006), these observations are directly correlated to realism in gaming. As it became clear so far, he rejects any theory of realism in gaming that merely strive for supporting either realistic visual representation or realism in an aesthetical sense. As he puts it, SR in games, however, is quite a different matter. For him, social realist game can be regarded as "[...] those games that reflect critically on the minutia of everyday life, replete as it is with struggle, personal drama and injustice." (GALLOWAY, 2006, p. 75). When social realism and games are combined, Galloway (2004) asserts that games actually claim to offer a socio-political critique of trivial details of mundane reality and its current real-life power struggles and structure. SR refers, therefore, to an understanding of realism distinct from those ones referred to in previous and existing debates of representation (GALLOWAY, 2006).

According to Galloway (2004), SR in gaming is "protorealism". This term refers to a sort of "[...] games that approximate the core aesthetic values of realism [...]" (GALLOWAY, 2006, p. 76). In that sense, he says, games demonstrate SR when they establish a meaningful, intimate relationship between the affective actions performed by gamers and the ordinary social contexts in which they live. A necessary condition for achieving SR in gaming is, what Galloway calls, the [...] congruence requirement [...]. Realism in gaming, in his words, "[...] requires a special congruence between the social reality depicted in the game and the social reality known and lived by the player." (GALLOWAY, 2006, p. 83). The role of such a "special

congruence", according to him, is to capture important aspects of the social realities in order to localize the game back into the correct socio-political milieu of available gamers where it rings true to them (GALLOWAY, 2006). In that sense, for him, realism in gaming is attained in so far as games are not removed from the social contexts in which they are played and not dissociated from the real-life struggles they portray.

In that respect, as Galloway (2004) remarks, the fidelity of context is key for the deployment of realism in gaming. In conjunction with a meaningful correspondence amongst the game-world, the affective actions of gamers and real social contexts in which they life, he states that some type of fidelity of context is needed to deploy true realism in gaming (GALLOWAY, 2006, p. 78). In gaming, the congruence requirement is met when it boils down to the affect of the gamer. This means that Galloway's (2006) congruence requirement is in fact twofold. First, a game should be the minutiae of everyday life in all its details to the extent of actually claiming to be an extension of real-life struggle. In this sense, realism in gaming is about the extension of gamers' daily experiences in their own social milieu. Second, a game should also offer some kind of critical reflection of the real socio-political environment. In this way, a "proto-realist" game should lead toward a direct criticism of current social policy which is supposed to be relevant to the gamer. In light of the above, Galloway (2006) presents a rather putative argument concerning the attainment of true congruence in social realist games. In any game that depicts the real world, true congruence emerges when a game is capable of establishing close correspondences "[...] between the real political reality of the gamer and the ability of the game to mimic and extend that political reality [...]" (GALLOWAY, 2006, p. 83). As far as "proto-realist" games must deal with the question of action, he indicates that a true SR in gaming is a continuing process of revisiting game's materiality and establishing faithful correspondences with gamer's daily social milieu.

4 A thin understanding of Galloway's account of social (indirect) realism

If Galloway is correct, then, realism in gaming would be deployed by improving the congruence between a game system's sensory interface and the social reality of the gamer. Paradoxically, though, IR seems to reveal an epistemological problem at the heart of Galloway's argument. To see why this is so, it is a mistake to argue that the images and the social reality presented through one game's visual interface looks more realistic than the

images and social reality presented through another's because it looks more like the real world. When a gamer looks at a videogame screen, he is looking at a representation by means of sense-data and looking at representations is radically different from looking at the reality itself. Indeed, there is a significant difference between perceiving an actual object and a representation of one, as the indirect realists would say. The claim that one experience is more realistic than another if that experience more faithfully represents the way things are is redeemed to be false.

In this regard, the initially plausible characterization of Galloway's true realism in gaming in terms of a meaningful correspondence between the fidelity of context by congruence with real social reality falls apart with very little prodding. Under the aegis of IR, the representations in videogames are sense-data, and thereby perceptual intermediaries of the reality. Videogames imposes a veil that forbids us to perceive the reality as it is, one could question if there is such a reality in itself. The only way the visual and textual representations in videogames may deploy such a "true realism" is providing a group of "privileged sense-data", which have the greatest predictive value to ascribe the "real" qualities of our social world. Galloway's notion of correspondence, at least in an indirect realist view, can only achieve realism in gaming if it allows us to have a "privileged perception" of the things that better represents the way mind-independent objects are in the real world.

Taking into consideration that we can only have an indirect access to the reality by the means of sense-datum, then what the "privileged sense-data" in videogames may causes on our perceptual experience is not a faithfully, mimicry representation of the reality. In this respect, Galloway seems to be in line with some of the IR prerogatives. In particular, when he suggests that it does not matter how accurately the perceived representation of the entities in the gaming-world actually corresponds to their counterparts in the physical world, it is not possible to videogames really mimic the way the world looks for the gamers. After all, in Galloway's view, realism in gaming is deeply grounded on the phenomenon of action and the correspondence between the representation in a game and the socio-political reality known and lived by gamers. Notwithstanding, whatever the sensations group of sense-data might causes on us, Galloway's notion of correspondence in gaming can never grant us a direct and privileged access to the external world. What Galloway's theory of SR really offers to us is an indirect correspondence, that is, an experience of perceiving a group of sense-data from real-life struggles portrayed by videogames about our socio-political

milieu. It is the sensations we perceive caused by the relations between groups of "privileged sense-data" in videogames that enable to us comprehend a certain point of view of real-life situations portrayed by videogames. In that sense, Galloway is correct when he states that gamers can become aware of, sensitive about their social reality that is carried out by the perspective of a videogame. However, even if the sense-data caused by the representations of videogames grants a "privileged perception" of the social reality, gamers can only have indirect perceptual experiences of the reality through a game. Therefore, Galloway ambition of achieving true realism by means of his theory of SR in gaming fades away.

5 Conclusion

In this essay, we argued that Galloway's theory of SR presupposes indirect realist assumptions. In order to provide support to our claim, we assumed that his theory of realism is suggestive of an indirect form of correspondence between the fidelity of gamers' ordinary world, their derivative actions within the gaming-world and the modes of representation of objective reality depicted in videogames. Even if gamers are capable of establishing a meaningful and intimate correspondence between their affective actions in the gaming-world, the representation of social contexts in a game and its counterpart in the mundane world, this does not mean videogames allow gamers to access the reality as it is. What it is established and revealed to gamers in the representations of ordinary social contexts in a videogame is sense-data. If so, what gamers really perceive through gameplay, according to the IR, is a group of sense-data which hold or not the greatest predictive value to determine the ascription of the reality. The relation between privileged sense-data contributes to make gamers feel the representation within the gaming-world and its objects as realistic as possible.

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É possível fazer declarações verdadeiras sobre o mundo através dos videogames? Uma abordagem realista indireta à noção de realismo social em videogames de Alexander Galloway

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, alguns acadêmicos alegaram que o estudo dos videogames é importante para entender e desafiar o conceito de realismo preconizado pelas antigas teorias da cultura visual. De fato, os videogames têm sido reconhecidos como uma mídia capaz de oferecer novas maneiras de interrogar as teorias tradicionais do realismo. Com base no trabalho seminal de Alexander Galloway, intitulado de *Social realism in gaming*, o argumento que procuramos avançar aqui é o seguinte: as teorizações desse autor acerca do realismo social nos videogames, juntamente com sua noção de "requisito de congruência", são amplamente baseadas em suposições realistas indiretas. Para tal, assumimos que teoria de social realismo de Galloway é sugestiva de uma forma indireta de correspondência entre: a fidelidade do mundo comum dos jogadores, suas ações derivativas no mundo dos jogos e os modos de representação da realidade objetiva descritos nos videogames.

Palavras-chave

Videogames. Alexander Galloway. Realismo Social. Realismo Indireto.

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