ABSTRACT

The relation between games and simulations can be profitably investigated by combining ontological tools and recent neurological findings. Neurology shows that simulations are connected to fiction or to reality by a suspension of disbelief or alternatively a suspension of belief, and ontological categories of Mimesis (simulation of an event or an object) and Catharsis (simulation of the experience of an event or object) lead to a classification of ludic simulations, which allow to discover some of their hidden properties. This paper raises some new issues for the field, like Embodied Simulation, Simulations of Depth and of Surface, the Ontological and the Epistemological Barrier, the Simulation Story, and the K-Rule. Finally, some wittgensteinian tools (semantic, syntactic, infra-semantic, and super-syntactic) are used in order to suggest how to transform a simulation into a ludic simulation.

Keywords: Catharsis, Embodied Simulation, Game, Mimesis, Ontology, Simulation

1. MIMESIS AND CATHARSIS

Computer games are the most powerful contemporary media, but perhaps the less exploited one. According to Mary Flanagan (2009), computer games can be understood within the broader context of ludic activities, which, as emphasized by Celia Pearce (2009, p. 3), were born thousands of years ago. We can analyze games and their relation with simulations by the means of an ancient lens, the aesthetic theories of Mimesis and Catharsis, combined with the tools offered by some recent neurological findings.

According to Plato, art and other fictive representations such as games are a Mimesis of an object, passive copies of reality (which is in turn a copy of the supercelestial realm). There is a mirror engine in Plato’s theory: fiction reflects reality, and the behavior of the spectators (hereinafter: the users) reflects what they have previously seen in fiction. To Plato, the users are in a passive relation with the artwork, which leads them to introject and to imitate its contents without any filters. On the contrary, Aristotle describes art not as a passive copy that can only be copied by the user, but instead as a representation shaped by the users themselves, who actively project their desires (pouring them off) onto the affordances offered by the artwork. So, the mimetic theory of Plato gives a huge and dark power to art, whereas the cathartic theory of Aristotle assigns art the simple role of balancing the excesses of society.

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In order to describe how real users interact with representations we have to merge Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories. Indeed the mimetic and the cathartic approaches are two cognitive behaviors which normally come together (Figure 1):

These behaviors are simultaneous and always present, but some users are more mimetic and others are more cathartic. Developmental studies show that children are inclined to be more mimetic than adults, and also common sense suggests to be careful about which fictions we present them with, while adults can enjoy more freedom. Only when the child becomes familiar with fictive representations such as films and games they can develop the ability of distinguishing what is real from what is fiction. The evolutionary cognitivism of Giovanni Liotti (1994), grounding on the works of John Bowlby (1988) and Mary Ainsworth (1978), finds in the process of socialization the concrete installation of the Freudian reality principle, which leads the adult to have a complex array of repressed Interpersonal Motivational Systems, such as aggression, sexual desire and hierarchical satisfaction. These repressed desires can be virtually satisfied by projecting them into a fictive environment, i.e. a Catharsis.

This could lead to think that Mimesis comes before and in a sense generates Catharsis, but the psychologist Donald Winnicott (1971) has shown that the first occurrences of fiction are instead a sort of ‘mind simulation’ which involves Catharsis. The imaginative thinking arises when the child starts to pretend that something external is different from what s/he really believes: for example when a nine month baby, following the desire of pure nutrition and care, treats a handkerchief (the transitional object) as if it were the mother’s breast. Only later the child will begin to pretend in first person to be something or someone that s/he is not.

Also games studies find a sequence in third and first person games, closely related to third and first person simulations: the third person ludic simulations of external objects (like those with little soldiers) normally precede the first person ludic simulations of roles (like those with gun toys). And also the evolution of the broadly adopted computer gaming graphic seems to confirm Winnicott’s findings (Table 1):

Given that 3D has been present since the origins of the medium (Colley, 1973), the causes of the evolution of the broad implementations from third to first person view cannot be just technical, but rather related to the growing literacy of computer game users. Indeed child players do not manage First Person views if they had not played with Third Person view before and preferably also with Semi-Subjective view.

In any case, we must not confuse the view with the relation between player and game. There are First Person Simulations (which sometimes use a first person perspective, but not always), and Third Person Simulations (which very rarely use a first person perspective). A First Person Simulation takes the player into account, his/her role is both inside and outside the simulation, i.e. in the real world simulated by the game. The Third Person Simulation instead puts the player in a sort of divine, external position. In this case the role of the player does not have a reference into the real world. (Table 2)

Note that these categories are not related with the work of Pearce (2004). We can combine the First and Third Person Simulation categories with the categories of Mimesis and Catharsis. Developmental cognitivism considers Mimesis

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Figure 1. In blue the Catharsis, in orange the Mimesis
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[www.igi-global.com/article/lost-in-translation/93025?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/lost-in-translation/93025?camid=4v1a)

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