



The Sociology of Video Games in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is that there is a growing and consolidating video game ethos that permeates our society and serves as a valuable prism by the means of which we may examine broader sociological issues in contemporary society. Video games are therefore understood as a manifestation of life and culture in contemporaneity. Thus, this paper not only contributes to our understanding of video games as experience, culture, and socio-technical assemblage, but also to our understanding of contemporary social issues such as work, education, culture, agency, power, experience, empathy, and identity. The paper examines complicated concepts affecting current society via the lens of video game culture, rendering them more concrete and approachable. Additionally, this paper incorporates a number of essential concepts and ideas that are regularly used in research on video games but are rarely completely developed in terms of their significance, meaning, or application. Thus, the study expands the boundaries of game studies by exploring new theoretical and methodological frameworks for the examination of neo-liberalistic, participatory culture, escapism and instant gratification of videogames.

Keywords: Video-games, sociology, addiction, escapism, cultural studies.



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INTRODUCTION

Sociologists' primary objective is to comprehend the social reality in which they live. Sociology attempts to study a predominantly sensitive area of reality because it touches on a component of reality that has a significant impact on how we behave as individuals and groups, societies and communities, citizens and human beings. Sociology plays a perilous role in the establishment of knowledge or even of truth that shape social life and its structure.

In this light, Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron argue that the border between common knowledge and science is more blurred in sociology than any other academic domain[1]. This vicinity concerning the sociologist and their subject of study introduces numerous risks, not the least of which is a conflation of academic knowledge and that produced by other social actors. Since, society and sociology are inextricably linked, there is room for using this proximity as an epistemological vantage point; that is, it is a vantage point, or prism, through which one can attempt to better understand contemporary culture and society. Thus, the endeavour of this paper shall be to highlight key aspects of contemporary society through the study of video-games.

One could make the argument that there is no such thing as a consolidated and consistent video game 'culture'. The argument has frequently been made, and rightly so, that video games, their players, and their culture cannot be homogenised. It's self-evident to any individual with even a passing familiarity with video games that playing Valorant(Riot Games)[2] on a personal computer is vastly different from playing FIFA (Electronic Arts)[3] on a game console, which is starkly different from playing PUBG (Tencent games)[4] on a mobile phone.

¹Bourdieu, Pierre, Chamboredon, Jean-Claude and Passeron, Jean-Claude(2011). *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110856460>

²Riot Games, Inc. "Riot Games' Competitive 5V5 Character-Based Tactical Shooter." VALORANT, Riot Games, Inc., 2 June 2020, <https://playvalorant.com/en-us/>.

³"About FIFA." FIFA, EA Sports, <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa>.

⁴"PUBG Mobile: #1 Battle Royale Mobile Game." PUBG MOBILE | #1 BATTLE ROYALE MOBILE GAME, <https://www.pubgmobile.com/en-US/>.

In the same way, the manner in which video games are played and experienced in the United States differs significantly from how they are played and experienced in other nations, such as India. Therefore, the challenges of discussing a single video game culture are recognised and accepted. Video game culture is no exception to the rule that all cultures are dynamic and never stagnant.

Nonetheless, we can articulate a subject of study, even if only in one's imaginations, which is video game culture, just as we may discuss the modern nature of 'British culture' or 'Spanish culture' at a certain degree. As Simmel argues, just as we may study the behaviour of the Greeks and Persians at the Battle of Marathon without understanding the behaviour of each individual, we can separate – at least analytically – form (video game culture in general) and substance (video game culture in particular) (the concrete cases: the various types of video games, styles of play, gamers, platforms, and social contexts, and so on).

Four essential assumptions underpin the decision to study video games in order to better comprehend current society and the transformations that shape it:

- a) Video games are unquestionably a part of contemporary society
- b) Video games encapsulate several of the most vital facets of contemporary reality.
- c) Video games have a long history as cultural forms.
- d) A burgeoning and consolidated video game culture exists.

To begin, video games are unquestionably a part of contemporary life. As the purpose of this paper is to emphasise on critical features of contemporaneity from a sociological, cultural, and media studies perspective, the world of video games is an ideal venue in which to do so. Video games have only been relevant, at least socially, since the 1980s. Since then, video games have risen enormously, particularly in the last decade or so, as a result of the so-called 'casual revolution' and the expansion of video gaming to mobile devices and online social networking sites, most notably Facebook, (now called Meta)[5]. Video games are by their very nature postmodern and they carry the promise of a new world on the horizon.

This subsequently leads us to our next rationale, which is to claim that video games provide an important lens through which to view society's current critical shifts. In this view, video games include several critical facets of contemporary society, including a widespread online internet culture, the prevalence of neoliberal political lucidities, the advent of participatory culture, and the creation of novel modalities of meaning formation. We live in an ecosphere that has been entirely submerged by technology which has had a huge impact on our social life and our interactions with our environment.

By definition, video games are digital, making them one of the most significant cultural items of the digital age and amongst the finest entrances for understanding digital culture. Correspondingly, video games mirror current society's hegemonic political rationalities, those of neoliberalism, in which individuals are guided by their freedom of choice and individual obligation is given.

The primary role accorded to the video game thespian as demiurge of what occurs when playing the same reaffirms this position. Nevertheless, video game culture also incorporates more collective and participatory rationalities and cultures: it is a 'participatory culture', which can be characterised as one that enables everyday patrons to actively partake in the creation and alteration of media material.

Furthermore, video games have emerged as one of the most influential cultural products and objects of our generation. As the Kirby questionnaire indicates, "digimodernism" is contemporary society's dominant cultural logic and the video game and the player serve as its primary object and subject, then understanding video game culture delivers us with critical tools for comprehending our present cultural landscape[6]. The video game business is a growing cultural industry that is establishing itself as the field's dominant force. Revenues from video game firms continue to grow year after year (Chatfield, 2011; ESA, 2020) and do not appear to have peaked[7,8].

⁵D'Anastasio, Cecilia(2020). "Facebook Gaming Is Here-but Who Is It for?" *Wired*, Conde Nast, <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-gaming-app-impressions/>.

⁶Myerson, Joel, et al(2014). "Discounting of Delayed Rewards: (a)Theoretical Interpretation of the Kirby Questionnaire." *Behavioural Processes*, pp. 99–105., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2014.07.021>.

⁷Chatfield, Tom (2011). *Fun Inc.: Why Gaming Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Pegasus.

⁸Fitzgerald, Dylan(2021). "2020 Essential Facts about the Video Game Industry." *Entertainment Software Association*, <https://www.theesa.com/resource/2020-essential-facts/>.

According to ESA's 2017 statistics[9], an increasing number of people, regardless of their demographics, play video games. Similarly, video game expos and museums, as well as conferences, festivals, tournaments, and other video game-related events, have exploded in popularity during the previous few years. Additionally, a slew of new occupations, courses, and degrees devoted to the development, design, and research of video games have emerged in the fields of education and employment. In terms of the academic world, the emergence of a discipline called games studies (Aarseth, 2001; Wolf and Perron, 2015), as well as a growing interest in studying video games across a variety of disciplines, attest to video games' relevance in contemporary society[10,11].

Ultimately, one may claim that there is a rising and consolidating video game culture, defined as the institutionalisation of video gaming practises, experiences, and meanings in contemporary society, which pervades practically every nook and cranny. This indicates that an increasing number of facets of our society may be interpreted via the lens of video games; in other words, we are witnessing the "videoludification"[12] of society.

Video games can not only reflect bigger social issues, but they can also shape and transform them. This can be seen in the gamification of specific aspects of social reality, or the application of game components – most notably from video games – to other domains like education, labour, therapy, business, warfare, academia, and interpersonal relationships. Social reality is turned into a (video) game, and video game culture has a significant impact on society. Thus, even if some social actors dismiss video games as a culture, video game culture has an impact on them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It was not until Irving Finkel organised a symposium in 1990 that grew into the International Board Game Studies Association, Gonzalo Frasca popularised the term "ludology" (from the Latin word for game, ludus) in 1999, the first issues of academic journals such as Board Game Studies and Game Studies were published in 1998 and 2001, and the Digital Games Research Association was founded in 2003 that scholars began to get the sense that the study of games could (and should) be done academically[13].

As a relatively new area, it brings together scholars from a variety of disciplines that have long been interested in games, including psychology, anthropology, economics, education, and sociology. The term "ludology" was first used in 1982, in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's article "Does Being Human Matter – On Some Interpretive Problems of Comparative Ludology"[14].

One of the foremost social science theories (1971) regarding the function of video games in society focused on video game violence, which became known as the catharsis theory[15]. According to the notion, playing violent video games may actually channel latent aggressiveness, ensuing in reduced aggression in the players' real life.

Yet, a meta-study conducted in 2001 by Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman reviewed statistics dating all the way back to the 1980s and ending with the publication of the article. The goal of this research was to determine whether or not playing violent video games increased aggression. They concluded that an acquaintance with video game violence did definitely result in an increase in hostility[16].

Although, as psychologist Jonathan Freedman has pointed out, and further emphasised, that this study was quite inadequate and even problematic, since excessively bold claims were made and the writers themselves appeared to be tremendously prejudiced in their publications.

⁹Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data Essential ... - Theesa.com. https://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ESA_EssentialFacts_2017.pdf.

¹⁰Aarseth, and Espen. *Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis*. 2003, <http://www.bendevane.com/VTA2012/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/02.GameApproaches2.pdf>.

¹¹"Game Design." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, 2014, pp. 109–116., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203114261-20>.

¹²Raessens, Joost. *The Ludification of Culture*. <https://d-nb.info/1220636800/34>.

¹³Frasca, Gonzalo. "LUDODOLOGY MEETS NARRATOLOGY: Similitude and Differences between (Video)Games and Narrative." *Ludology*, Helsinki, <https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/ludology.htm>.

¹⁴Jesper, Author. "The Definitive History of Games and Stories, Ludology and Narratology." *The Ludologist*, 8 Nov. 2013, <https://www.jesperjuul.net/ludologist/2004/02/22/the-definitive-history-of-games-and-stories-ludology-and-narratology/>.

¹⁵Love, Ruth Leeds, et al. "Television and Aggression: An Experimental Field Study." *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1972, p. 365., <https://doi.org/10.2307/2063539>.

¹⁶Anderson, Craig A., and Brad J. Bushman. "Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature." *Psychological Science*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2001, pp. 353–359., <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00366>.

Topical research indicates that a dominant social structure exists among meetings of video game fans, or 'gamers'. Mäyrä (2008, p. 25) argues that gamers who congregate to play have a common vocabulary, participate in communal rituals, and are frequently interested in cultural objects such as video game paraphernalia[17].

Gee (2003), in his seminal book, "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning", justified thirty-six video game learning principles and elucidated how video games can help players develop comprehend a variety of cultural modes by immersing them in a specific cultural worldview[18].

In a similar vein, Bogost (2011) asserts that one of the exclusive characteristics of video games is their capacity to place players in the shoes of others[19]. Similarly, not only Facer, Furlong, and Sutherland [20] argue that video games appear to be a tool for allowing players to realize and model alternative ways of being, "to imaginatively inhabit alternative realities," but Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche, De Wever, Soetaert, and Valcke (2016, p. 1740) argue that video games "provide a window into how other people interpret specific problems, dilemmas, and situations [21].

Additionally, Granic, Lobel, and Engels (2014), as well as Greitemeyer and Mügge (2014), claim that video-gamers who engage in pro social video games are more likely to participate in social and civic crusades in their daily lives.

Zielke in his study believes that video games deliver players with a "safe" environment in which to obtain culture and experiment with cultural identities in a virtual environment that closely resembles real life [22]. Dr. Mortara in his paper presents the same view and that video games allow players to immerse themselves in cultural content in an appealing manner. The study's primary finding is that video games provide an escape from previously fixed belief systems, hackneyed cultural associations, and racial bias[23].

This validates that video games have the potential to influence players' ethical mindsets and attitudes toward culturally diverse people (Cuhadar & Kampf, 2014; Zagal, 2009) [24,25]. Acquiring cultural knowledge and stimulating the expansion of intercultural literacy, socio cultural literacy, cultural awareness and self-awareness, and cultural understanding of diverse geopolitical spaces all pose challenges to established cultural patterns while providing a simulation or at least an imitation of real-life that allows for the integration of in-game learning and practices into real-world perceptions and actions. Petkov & Rogers in their 2011 study remark that it demonstrates how video games are increasingly influencing and expanding players' imaginations and worldviews [26].

The goal of this sociologically informed study has been to move away from simplistic conceptions of gaming as either 'evil' or 'good,' and instead to comprehend its function and place within the complexities of everyday life. Nina Fefferman, for instance, believes that the massively popular MMO World of Warcraft may be used to study infectious disease transmission due to the game's unintended spread of a plague-like illness[27].

The work of objectively assessing the influence of video games on current culture is an ongoing task given the ever-evolving nature of this medium. There will never be a single conclusive piece of research on this topic, but an ongoing process of carefully examining the impacts of various forms of video gaming on diverse people in an almost endless range of circumstances is required. This may be discouraging, but it is an important reminder to be informed about the impact of video games on the values and behaviour of gamers of all ages and cultures.

¹⁷Mäyrä Frans. *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. Sage, 2011.

¹⁸DUPLICATE, Gee James Paul SUPPRESSED. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁹Bogost, Ian. *How to Talk about Videogames*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

²⁰Sutherland, Rosamund, et al. "A New Environment for Education? the Computer in the Home." *Computers & Education*, vol. 34, no. 3-4, 2000, pp. 195–212., [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0360-1315\(99\)00045-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0360-1315(99)00045-7).

²¹Bourgonjon, Jeroen, et al. "Players' Perspectives on the Positive Impact of Video Games: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Online Forum Discussions." *New Media & Society*, vol. 18, no. 8, 2016, pp. 1732–1749., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815569723>.

²²"Gaming Gets 'Serious': Unlocking the Legend of Pain Management." *Office of Research and Innovation*, 8 Sept. 2021, <https://research.utdallas.edu/blog/gaming-gets-serious-unlocking-the-legend-of-pain-management>.

²³Mortara, Michela, et al. "Learning Cultural Heritage by Serious Games." *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2014, pp. 318–325., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2013.04.004>.

²⁴Cuhadar, Esra, and Ronit Kampf. "Learning about Conflict and Negotiations through Computer Simulations: The Case of Peacemaker." *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2014, pp. 509–524., <https://doi.org/10.1111/insp.12076>.

²⁵"Capitalizing on Paratexts: Gameplay, Ethics, and Everyday Life." *Cheating*, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/1802.003.0013>.

²⁶Education in the Age of Technology. "'Serious' Video Games to Motivate." *Education in the Age of Technology*, 11 Dec. 2018, <https://educationintheageoftechnology.com/2018/12/10/serious-video-games-to-motivate/>.

²⁷Lofgren, Eric T, and Nina H Fefferman. "The Untapped Potential of Virtual Game Worlds to Shed Light on Real World Epidemics." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, vol. 7, no. 9, 2007, pp. 625–629., [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099\(07\)70212-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099(07)70212-8).

METHODOLOGY

From a methodological standpoint, the research that underpins this paper has been purely qualitative. Appropriate literature concerning the topic for the report has been referred to and accordingly cited to gain an insight into the sociology of video-games in contemporary society to help gain deep contextual understandings by employing non-numerical methods and data triangulation.

The research has been conducted through the “use of play” (see Mäyrä, 2008; Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum, 2011; Karppi and Sotamaa, 2012; van Vught and Glas, 2017). In this respect, video gamers are viewed as active 'participants' in this study. Frans Mayra (2008: 165) remarks that playing games is the ‘most critical component of any game studies technique’[28].

Due to this, numerous authors claim that in order to completely comprehend video games, the researcher must play them. It is not the authors’ intention to discuss the value, limitations, and application of play as a research instrument in detail here, as others, such as Jasper van Vught and René Glas (2017), have already provided an excellent overview of this method; however, it is necessary to succinctly emphasise some of the most salient features of what is still a largely novel and innovative research method, as well as to outline the authors’ approach here.

Van Vught and Glas (2017), in particular, developed a classification of approaches to employing play as an investigatory method, based on two axes: emphasis and style. Van Vught and Glas indicate that researchers can implement an 'object' or 'process' focus in terms of focus. They define an object approach as an academic study that treats games as a distinct item that must be investigated in order to comprehend their structure or content. This can then draw on a more literary tradition, examining the storey or iconography of the game, or on a more ludological tradition, examining characteristics of the game such as its structure and rules. A process-oriented approach entails 'shifting the focus away from the player or the game and onto the numerous factors and connections that support the assembling of games as processes' (van Vught and Glas, 2017: 3). This thus provides a more contextualised approach, situating games, player, and the researcher inside a broader socio cultural framework and framework of understanding. Following that, van Vught and Glas (2017) emphasise the importance of the researcher's choice of game[29].

They provide a distinction for 'instrumental' and 'free' playing techniques here. Instrumental play occurs when the scholar wishes to assess the entirety of the game's capabilities, such as through examining all game locations or play styles. By contrast, free play occurs when the researcher attempts to undermine the favoured reading of the game by engaging in 'transgressive play' (Karppi and Sotamaa, 2012), such as cheating and pushing the game's boundaries to discover and push the feasible[30].

As, van Vught and Glas (2017)'s model is primarily an analytical tool, and many scholars combine or haze the lines between various kinds of play; thus, as with the majority of game scholars, this methodology does not always cleanly fall into one category.

Similarly, the writers’ playing techniques varied considerably. At times, this amounted to little more than what Aarseth (2003) refers to as ‘superficial play’, in which the researchers briefly engaged in a game. And in other cases, this necessitated a far more meticulous and methodical examination of video-games with a heavy variation in playing styles.

Along with engaging in many more games than one typically would, and doing it in a much more deliberate and investigative manner, the research chose to connect with broader video game culture in a profounder and more meaningful manner. This involved significantly more regular and focused non-participant observation of online and offline gaming culture than one would have done otherwise, such as reading and viewing video game publications, blogs, reviews, message boards, and YouTube and Twitch channels on a regular basis. Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, web pages, and blogs, among others, provide a social arena in which social relationships are formed and social reality takes shape which is especially true and very significant in the context of video game culture.

NEO LIBERALISTIC & PARTICIPATORY CULTURE OF VIDEO GAMES

The term "interactivity" is frequently connected with video games. In fact, one of the most common arguments used to distinguish video games from other cultural products or media is their participatory nature. It is frequently said that in video games, players "do not simply consume a pre-existing piece of media, but rather are active participants in the

²⁸Mäyrä Frans. *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. Sage, 2011.

²⁹Van Vught, Jasper, and René Glas. “Considering Play: From Method to Analysis.” *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.26503/todigra.v4i2.94>.

³⁰Sutherland, Rosamund, et al. “A New Environment for Education? the Computer in the Home.” *Computers & Education*, vol. 34, no. 3-4, 2000, pp. 195–212., [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0360-1315\(99\)00045-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0360-1315(99)00045-7).

construction of their experience"[31]. This is then frequently cited as conclusive evidence that video games are the purest form of a new paradigm of cultural consumption[32]; one that necessitates the player's explicit engagement.

This is often contrasted with a more vertical model, which is traditionally associated with 'older' media such as television, cinema, or literature; indicating a shift away from social models that are primarily concerned with 'spectatorship'[33] and toward those that are concerned with 'participation'[34].

However, this reasoning has its limitations. It can be argued that a binary distinction between 'active' and 'passive' media is deeply flawed, because no relationship with any cultural product is unidirectional: a book or a film may be considered closed works, but the multiple ways in which they are interpreted and transformed at all levels – individual, social, and cultural – make it more difficult to maintain the vision of the uncritical subject who passively absorbs everything they receive. Furthermore, we risk disregarding the limitations of interactivity and player agency imposed by video games[35]. Players do not have complete control over video games; they are constrained by the game's own constraints and arc of possibilities. Nonetheless, the authors would like to emphasise that video games continue to provide a unique vantage point from which to explore the contemporary form of agency.

Video games have always been praised for providing players with a variety of options, but we believe that in recent years, this feature has grown even more prominent and clear in specific games and genres, and there are several titles that directly explore the concept of player agency. For instance, *'Until Dawn'* (Supermassive Games, 2015) and *'Life is Strange'* (Don't nod Entertainment, 2015) use the 'butterfly effect' metaphor and imagery to convey to the player that everything they do may affect the storyline and the characters' fate. Similarly, *'Dreamfall Chapters'* (Red Thread Games, 2014) warns players whenever a relevant choice has been made, by announcing that 'the balance has shifted'. Moreover, the recent oeuvre of Telltale Games such as *'The Walking Dead'* (season 1, 2012; season 2, 2013; season 3, 2016), *'The Wolf Among Us'* (2013), *'Game of Thrones'* (2014), *'Tales from the Borderlands'* (2014), and *'Batman: The Telltale Series'* (2016) let the player know that the story will be tailored by their choices. Other titles like Quantic Dream's *'Heavy Rain'* (2010), *'Beyond: Two Souls'* (2013), and *'Detroit: Become Human'* (2018) toy with the same ideas and, in their case, offer multiple endings depending on the decisions made.

Furthermore, most of these games provide data on the decisions taken at the end of each chapter – since they are typically presented in an episodic format – allowing each player to compare their personal choices to the rest of the population who have played the video game.

The question of agency, as well as the player's ability to make important changes, is at the heart of this video game trend.

Many discussions over the research or definitions of video games revolve around the concept of agency, or player control. However, the meaning and form of agency are frequently taken for granted in this context, and it is rarely clearly explored and articulated in any depth.

This approach to agency is primarily based on actor–network theory and Michel Foucault's work. The former will assist us in defining the parameters of what counts as change and transformation – and the alternatives that it offers – in a given political and cultural context, while the latter will assist us in defining the parameters of what counts as change and transformation – and the alternatives that it offers.

There are three key features that determine agency, according to an actor–network perspective- [36]

1. Agency creates differences and changes;
2. Agency has numerous qualities that do not lie in any one prototype actor;
3. Agency is diffused and dislocated.

As a result, the heart of all agency is that it either generates change or does not exist.

Only "through its action" can a specific actor's agency be identified[37]. As a result, video games – as well as the technology, connectivity, and peripherals that enable interactivity – can be thought of as actors. According to Arsenault

³¹Calleja, and Gordon. "From Immersion to Incorporation." *In-Game*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8429.003.0012>.

³²KIRBY, ALAN. "The Possibility of Cyber-Placelessness." *The Planetary Turn*, 2015, pp. 71–88., <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3znz1s.8>.

³³Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Critical Editions, 2021.

³⁴Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York University Press, 2006.

³⁵Crawford, Garry. "Video Gamers." 2011, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203863374>.

³⁶Muriel, Daniel. "Para Una Sociología De Las Mediaciones: Cartografía Impresionista y Algunas (Breves) Reglas De Un Método Sociológico / toward a Sociology of Mediations: Impressionist Mapping and Some (Brief) Rules for a Sociological Method." *Revista Española De Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.5477/cis/reis.153.111>.

and Perron “The player does not act so much as he [sic.] reacts to what the game provides to him, and similarly, the game reacts to his input”[38].

The second feature of agency is that it exists in numerous forms and is not limited to a single actor. That is to say, action can be 'embodied' in a variety of ways and does not always require the presence of a specific actor[39]. One begins to see the plurality of agency when one investigates the different types of actors and actions. This in turn gives the academicians a lot of leeway in defining what an actor is, from thinking of it as a complex and abstract entity (like institutions, the rail network, or the human body) to thinking of it as a concrete person or object (like the president of a country, God, the authors of this text, or a specific video game). In a nutshell, it's a matter of recognising agency's heteromorphism.

This is seen in video games that purposefully strive to disempower the player. For instance, in ‘This War of Mine’ (11-bit studios, 2014), the player assumes the role of civilians in a war-torn city. The lack of a tutorial puts players on their own; the game disorients them, and they may not understand how things function right away. Or consider the ‘Dark Souls’ (From Software, 2011–2016) series, which heavily penalises players for making mistakes by making them repeat the same action multiple times, face the same foes, and go through the same scenarios. In addition, some horror video games, such as ‘Outlast’ (Red Barrel Studios, 2013), ‘Amnesia’ (Frictional Games, 2010), and ‘Alien: Isolation’ (Creative Assembly, 2014), put the player in the shoes of a highly vulnerable individual who can only flee or hide from their enemies, with almost no means of direct defence. These are only a few examples of how video games can be potential actors by interfering with the process.

Helen Thornham, who conducted an ethnographic study on video gamers in diverse UK families, agreed that if video games have the ability to interrupt and disturb players' discussions and gameplay, they should be given "affective agency"[40]. It is tough to ignore the effect of so many agents (human and non-human) who can condition and disrupt what the player is doing.

The third and final attribute of agency that we will look at here is that of distribution and dislocation. This concept of agency ignores "the alternative between actor and system"[41], which deals with the action–structure dichotomy that has hampered social science research since its inception. The fact that an individual may virtually never do what they wish is not explained by attributing it to an external social force, such as habitus, society, the group, or any other unique feature of reality that appropriates conduct.

The answer is based on the concept of dislocated action (Latour, 2007: 46), which is not reducible to any established social categories like those indicated. As a result, action is neither a direct product of the actor nor a product of the structure in which it occurs in conventional terms. Latour explains that his method arose from the need to address two issues:

- a) When social scientists are presented with what is known as the micro level (face-to-face interaction, or the local), they find that many of the things they require to provide meaning to a situation originate from a long distance away in time and space. This forces individuals to look at things from a different perspective (such as society, norms, values, culture, context, and structure); 'to focus on what isn't directly obvious in the situation but has shaped it into what it is'.
- b) Second, once at this higher, macro level, social scientists realise they are missing something since abstractions like culture, society, values, and structure appear to be too broad, so they return to looking at local situations, the flesh and blood situations they had previously abandoned.

A gaming experience is thus an event that brings together human subjects, a set of technologies, and a media-cultural practise; an event that 'emphasises the dynamic between the elements in play: entities coming together, material and

³⁷“Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies. Bruno Latour.” *Isis*, vol. 91, no. 2, 2000, pp. 341–342., <https://doi.org/10.1086/384756>.

³⁸“In the Frame of the Magic Cycle: The Circle(s) of Gameplay.” *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, 2008, pp. 131–154., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203887660-12>.

³⁹Durepos, Gabrielle. “Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-theory20082bruno Latour. Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory. Oxford University Press, 2005.” *Equal Opportunities International*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2008, pp. 307–309., <https://doi.org/10.1108/eoi.2008.27.3.307.2>.

⁴⁰Thornham, Helen. “Ethnographies of the Videogame.” 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315580562>.

⁴¹Durepos, Gabrielle. “Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-theory20082bruno Latour. Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory. Oxford University Press, 2005.” *Equal Opportunities International*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2008, pp. 307–309., <https://doi.org/10.1108/eoi.2008.27.3.307.2>.

aesthetic chains of cause and effect or feedback, which can only be “adequately addressed through acknowledgment of it bringing together of heterogeneous parts or participants”[42].

In video games, as in any other social encounter mediated by the dispositifs in which we live, players' agency is constrained by the system - what they can see, say, and do. Another question is whether the system – dispositif, apparatus, or assemblage – has well-defined contours: players are limited or enabled by the video game, but also by technology, developers, other players, and a plethora of other social actors (human and non-human); some are close in time and space, while others act at a distance. This may be demonstrated in how other agents can condition the player's agency, which in certain cases feels as though they are losing control of the scenario.

As a post-human, assembled, and relational process, video games enable us visualise the nature of agency in contemporary society. They do so inside the frameworks of dispositifs, apparatuses, and assemblages that govern and provide meaning to those transformations. crucial question, however, remains unanswered: “What are the political rationalities that constitute contemporary dispositifs and the agency that they empower?”

Political rationalities, according to Miller and Rose, are the regularities in political discourse for "the formulation and justification of idealised schemata for representing reality, analysing it, and rectifying it." Political rationalities are defined by three basic criteria according to their hypothesis [43]: -

- a) First, political rationalities have a moral dimension; they are founded on concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, mutual responsibility, citizenship, common sense, economic efficiency, prosperity, growth, fairness, or rationality that guide government activities.
- b) Second, political rationalities are epistemic; they are articulated in connection to a conception of the nature of the controlled objects, such as society, nation, population, or economy.
- c) Third, political rationalities are represented in a specific idiom; it is a language that functions as an intellectual machine for making reality thinkable in the context of certain political debates.

In summary, political rationalities are morally coloured, knowledge-based, and linguistically mediated. The hegemonic political rationalities in contemporary society are those connected with advanced-liberalism, or neoliberalism as it is more commonly known.

“Neoliberalism is a truly hegemonic phenomena of our day, concerning both political economics and ideological process in the fullest sense”, writes McGuigan[44]. At its foundation, neoliberalism is concerned with laissez-faire economic policies and relations, implying that the ideal model of economic success and wealth for everybody is an open and free market that stimulates competition.

Neoliberalism as an ideology emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, partly in response to growing concerns about the advent of totalitarian states and how they were restricting individual speech and freedom. In the mid- to late-1970s, a neoliberal agenda grew to prominence in Western nations, displacing a more "social-democratic" approach that had dominated much of mid-century politics. This was most prominently witnessed during the political reigns of Thatcher and Reagan in the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively, who implemented widespread tax cuts for the wealthy, the undermining of union powers and rights, deregulation, privatisation, and public-sector competition[45].

Taylor (2006: 159) compares video gamers to "central productive agents in game culture," describing them as "social labourers". She even goes so far as to say that "without the player's labour, there is no culture, no game"[46].

Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008: 138–139) take a similar stance, claiming that video games force players to explicitly interact with them, requiring "the user to engage in play"[47]. Furthermore, the player's involvement in the video game

⁴²Giddings, Seth. “Events and Collusions.” *Games and Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2008, pp. 144–157., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412008325485>.

⁴³Rose, Nikolas, and Peter Miller. “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government.” *Foucault and Law*, 2017, pp. 191–224., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315094021-9>.

⁴⁴Stanbridge, Alan. “Jim McGuigan, Rethinking Cultural Policy.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 80–81., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630902974045>.

⁴⁵“What Is Neoliberalism? Discourse, Ideology and the Real World.” *Neoliberalism and Applied Linguistics*, 2013, pp. 19–37., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203128121-6>.

⁴⁶Taylor, T. L. “Play between Worlds.” 2006, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5418.001.0001>.

⁴⁷Wimmer, Jeffrey. “Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen / Jonas Heide Smith / Susana Pajares Tosca (2008): Understanding Video Games. the Essential Introduction. New York / London: Routledge.” *Medien&Kommunikationswissenschaft*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2009, pp. 377–378., <https://doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2009-3-377>.

appears to be critical: 'it's truly you who wins and loses' (Kirby, 2009: 169). Video games are about 'power fantasies' and being in command in this setting[48].

This is the epitome of neoliberalism, in which players are portrayed as strong subjects capable of controlling the consequences of their actions in ways they could never imagine in their daily lives. Para texts in video game culture (such as the text on case video game boxes), according to Oliva, Pérez-Latorre, and Besal, encourage players to "choose," "collect," "manage," and "win," establishing what we should expect of a good game or a good player experience. Video games foster a sense of accomplishment and empowerment by inflating players' agency. Video games, in a more or less explicit way, encourage players to believe that if they are skilled enough or strive hard enough, they can succeed.

Video games create the conditions for these (perceived) success narratives, in which the player is the victor and can do whatever she or he wants. It's the image of a self-assured and driven person who can overcome any hurdle in their path. This depiction of agency is consistent with the traditional identification of humans as conscious, active, and intentional subjects, which celebrates modernity's 'emancipation of the rational or working subject' – a notion deeply rooted in neoliberalism's philosophical and political thinking[49].

This approach to agency, on an ontological level, ignores the idea of agency as multiple, diffused, and dislocated that we discussed before. It sustains the dualism that differentiates those perceived to be active (humans, subjects, and social systems) from those supposed to be passive (non-humans, objects, and nature) – as if agency were not present everywhere[50].

On a more socio-political level, this perspective reflects and reinforces neoliberalism's political rationalities, one of which is the construction of an active, autonomous subject who takes care of themselves or, at the very least, collaborates with others to solve their own specific problems[51]. As a result, video game culture is dominated by the notion that players are responsible for controlling the game and are willing to do so.

Thus, we have a neoliberal notion of agency that encompasses not only the reproduction of its rationalities, reinforcing liberal thinking and practises, but also the possibilities of rupture, and exploring new modes of power relations and agency that aid in the transformation of reality in more communitarian ways. Agency is the power that affects reality, but it must be enacted, and agency is transformed in the process. Video games mediate agency, propelling it in diverse ways and under different rationales across the social fabric. Assemblies of video games include tremendous agents that have the potential to transform, and are currently transforming, social reality which possess an important stake in the context of neoliberalism and agency.

VIDEO GAMES-THE DIGITAL OPIUM?

Video game addiction which is also known as gaming disorder or internet gaming disorder, is the problematic, compulsive use of video games that significantly impairs an individual's ability to function in various life domains over time. This and other ancillary concepts have sparked debate in the medical, scientific, and gaming communities, and have been the topic of much research, debate, and discussion among professionals from various fields.

When an individual engages in gaming activities at the expense of accomplishing daily obligations or pursuing other hobbies without consideration for the negative repercussions, such illnesses might be identified. The major requirement for this illness, according to the ICD-11, is a lack of self-control over gaming[52]. Gaming disorder was added to the 11th iteration of the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD)[53]. However, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) stated in 2013 that there is insufficient evidence for Internet gaming disease to be included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it considered it worthy of future research[54].

⁴⁸Bonfiglioli, Catriona. "Book Review: Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*." *Discourse & Communication*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 248–251., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481312472972c>.

⁴⁹Woodward, Ashley. "Beyond the Postmodern? the Inhuman Condition." *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748697243.003.0001>.

⁵⁰"After Method: An Introduction." *After Method*, 2004, pp. 9–25., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203481141-2>.

⁵¹"Introduction: Reframing Political Thought." *Powers of Freedom*, 1999, pp. 1–14., <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511488856.001>.

⁵²Krishna, Swapna. "The Who May Add Video Games to Its List of Recognized Addictions." *Engadget*, 13 May 2021, <https://www.engadget.com/2017-12-27-the-who-may-add-video-games-to-its-list-of-recognized-addictions.html>.

⁵³Pontes, Halley M., et al. "Measurement and Conceptualization of Gaming Disorder According to the World Health Organization Framework: The Development of the Gaming Disorder Test." *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2019, pp. 508–528., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00088-z>.

⁵⁴"Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition." *Psychiatry Online*, APA, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>.

The question of whether the condition is a distinct clinical entity or a presentation of underlying psychiatric problems is a source of debate. With no widely standardised or agreed-upon definitions, research has tackled the subject from a range of perspectives, making it difficult to generate evidence-based recommendations.

The American Medical Association's Council on Science and Public Health utilised this two-hour-per-day limit to define "gaming overuse" in their report, citing the American Academy of Paediatrics' recommendation of no more than one to two hours of "screen time" each day[55]. The ESA document cited in the Council report, on the other hand, does not include the two-hour-per-day data[56].

"Gaming disorder" was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and then included in the 11th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), which was accepted by the World Health Assembly in May 2019. On January 1, 2022, ICD-11 will be used and enforced for the first time[57,58].

The Internet Gaming Disorder Exam was the first psychometric test to assess IGD (IGD-20)[59]. This test consists of 20 questions meant to determine the scope of difficulties produced by disordered gaming as well as the severity of symptoms felt by gamers. On October 14, 2014, the test was originally published in a journal article in the PLoS ONE publication.

According to the American Psychiatric Association's framework for IGD, the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale–Short-Form (IGDS9-SF) is a short psychometric exam to assess video game addiction. Furthermore, the IGDS9-SF has strong empirical and clinical evidence and is a useful instrument for assessing IGD[60]. The "Gaming Disorder Test," a screening tool for Gaming Disorder, as described by the World Health Organization, was published in a journal paper on June 3, 2019[61].

The Internet can lead to a variety of addictions, including gaming addiction. MMORPG addiction is linked to negative consequences, although normal play is not. Younger people and men are more likely than older adults and women to have a gaming disorder. Adolescents are more likely than adults to develop video game disorder over time. An international meta-analysis of 34 jurisdictions found that gender has a small effect size, with the greatest effect in Asia, the smallest in Europe and Africa, and null in North America, and that economic factors, internet availability, social norms, and addiction-related health factors all mediate the effect of gender, with nations with a greater GDP per capita having less differences in video game addiction between genders[62].

Comorbid psychiatric diseases are risk factors as well as effects. There is a link between video game addiction and anxiety, sadness, ADHD, social phobia and a lack of psychosocial support[63,64], ADHD and associated symptoms, such as impulsivity and behavioural issues, raise the chances of developing a video game disorder. Although there is a strong link between internet gaming disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder, it is not specific, and internet gaming

⁵⁵Felicia, Patrick, and Ian Pitt. "Harnessing the Emotional Potential of Video Games." *Instructional Design*, pp. 1282–1299., <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-60960-503-2.ch511>.

⁵⁶ESA, 2008, *2005 Sales, Demographics, and Usage Data*.

⁵⁷Scutti, Susan. "Who Says 'Gaming Disorder' Is a Mental Health Condition." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 18 June 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/18/health/video-game-disorder-who/index.html>.

⁵⁸"ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, <https://icd.who.int/dev11/l1-m/en#/http%253A%252F%252Fid.who.int%252Ficd%252Fentity%252F1448597234>.

⁵⁹Pontes, Halley M., et al. "The Conceptualisation and Measurement of DSM-5 Internet Gaming Disorder: The Development of the IGD-20 Test." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 9, no. 10, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0110137>.

⁶⁰Pontes, Halley M., and Mark D. Griffiths. "Measuring DSM-5 Internet Gaming Disorder: Development and Validation of a Short Psychometric Scale." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 45, 2015, pp. 137–143., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.006>.

⁶¹Pontes, Halley M., et al. "Measurement and Conceptualization of Gaming Disorder According to the World Health Organization Framework: The Development of the Gaming Disorder Test." *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2019, pp. 508–528., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00088-z>.

⁶²Su, Wenliang, et al. "Are Males More Likely to Be Addicted to the Internet than Females? A Meta-Analysis Involving 34 Global Jurisdictions." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 99, 2019, pp. 86–100., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.04.021>.

⁶³González-Bueso, Vega, et al. "Association between Internet Gaming Disorder or Pathological Video-Game Use and Comorbid Psychopathology: A Comprehensive Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2018, p. 668., <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15040668>.

⁶⁴Sussman, Clifford J., et al. "Internet and Video Game Addictions." *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, pp. 307–326., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2017.11.015>.

disorder is phenomenologically and neurobiologically distinct, implying that internet gaming disorder is characterised by impulsivity rather than compulsivity[65].

Some personality qualities, such as high neuroticism, impulsivity, and aggression, have been found to be consistently significant predictors of internet gaming disorder, and a combination of personality traits appears to play a key role in the condition's acquisition, maintenance, and growth[66].

Even though there has been a lot of study on problematic online gaming use since the 1980s, the mechanisms aren't fully understood because of the different criteria employed in academic and research studies. King D, Delfabbro P, Griffiths Min their hypotheses try to explain video games' possibly addictive character by focusing on their claimed built-in reward mechanisms, such as compulsion loops[67]. The anticipation of such benefits might cause a neurological reaction that releases dopamine into the body, causing the person to remember the reward as a good experience after it is obtained. This has been discovered to be similar to the neurological reaction of other behavioural addictions including substance misuse and gambling problem, though not to the same extent and with certain distinctions [68].

Another reason online video games are potentially addicting, according to Mark Griffiths, is that they "may be played all day every day."For some, the idea that the game has no conclusion can be rewarding, and as a result, gamers become more involved in the game [69].

Long-term internet video/mobile game play affects reward, impulse regulation, and sensory-motor coordination brain areas. Video game addicts have poor inhibitory control and reward circuits, and structural investigations revealed changes in the volume of the ventral striatum, possibly as a result of changes in rewards. Video game play is linked to dopamine release in the same way that drug misuse is, and the presentation of gaming images activates brain areas in the same way that drug images do for drug addicts. The activity of the areas associated with cravings found a decrease in treatment studies that used fMRI to measure brain connectivity alterations[70].

Despite the fact that the number of neuro imaging studies on video gaming addiction is increasing, there are significant methodological flaws, most notably the unreliability of psychometric assessments. Furthermore, the findings on lower inhibition should be tempered because only one study included a functional control group, which found no difference in inhibition. According to a meta-analytic evaluation of the study done by Ferguson and Christopher J for the Journal of Psychiatric Research, the data implies that video game addiction develops as a result of other mental health issues rather than being the cause of them. Thus, it's uncertain whether video game addiction is a distinct diagnosis[71].

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH & CONCLUSION

This research has presented the groundwork to study other contemporary sociological issues present and attributed to video games and its culture. The research could be further extrapolated to analyse video games beyond escapism, violence and addiction and explore the themes of empathy and identity.

The chapter, "Video Games-The Digital Opium?" was authored to present a broader perspective probing into the reason as to why video game addiction is not a discrete diagnosis. Even though the number of neuroimaging research on video game addiction is growing, there are substantial methodological faults, the most notable of which is the unreliability of psychometric measures. Thus, different organisations have different conclusions and perspectives on this particular topic and this chapter intended to put forth an unbiased perspective of the same in a concise and consolidated manner.

⁶⁵Long, Jiang, et al(2018). "Prevalence and Correlates of Problematic Online Gaming: A Systematic Review of the Evidence Published in Chinese." *Current Addiction Reports*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 359–371., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-018-0219-6>.

⁶⁶Männikkö, Niko, et al(2017). "Problematic Gaming Behaviour and Health-Related Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Health Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 67–81., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105317740414>.

⁶⁷King, Daniel(2016). "Editorial: Internet Addictions." *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, vol. 10, no. 3, <https://doi.org/10.5817/cp2016-3-1>.

⁶⁸Sussman, Clifford J., et al(2018). "Internet and Video Game Addictions." *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 307–326., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2017.11.015>.

⁶⁹Griffiths, Mark(2010). "Online Video Gaming: What Should Educational Psychologists Know?" *Educational Psychology in Practice*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 35–40., <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360903522769>.

⁷⁰Weinstein, Aviv, and Michel Lejoyeux(2015). "New Developments on the Neurobiological and Pharmacogenetic Mechanisms Underlying Internet and Videogame Addiction." *The American Journal on Addictions*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 117–125., <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajad.12110>.

⁷¹Ferguson, Christopher J., et al(2011). "A Meta-Analysis of Pathological Gaming Prevalence and Comorbidity with Mental Health, Academic and Social Problems." *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, vol. 45, no. 12, pp. 1573–1578., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2011.09.005>.

Similarly, the chapter, “Neo-Liberalistic & Participatory Culture of Video Games” was written with an attempt to highlight the contemporary nature of agency, participatory culture and neo-liberal political rationalities in video games. It is presented that studying video games and their culture is an ideal field in which to approach questions related to the contemporary nature of agency, interactivity, political rationalities, freedom, and power because of the medium's obsession with offering an experience of freewill, difficult choices, actions with consequences, and a generalised discourse about the centrality of the video game player.

It was discovered that there are multiple instances where individuals express explicit thoughts about the relationship between empathy and video games. There is even a label called *empathy games* to refer to a certain genre of video games like Papers, Please; a categorization that could similarly be applied to other titles such as Gone Home (Full bright, 2013), Fire watch (Campo Santo, 2016), Valiant Hearts (Ubisoft, 2014), That Dragon Cancer (Numinous Games, 2016), Cart Life (Hofmeier, 2011), To the Moon (Freebird Games, 2011), Spec Ops: The Line (Yager Development, 2012), Dys4ia (Anthropy, 2012), and Depression Quest (Quinn, 2013). As a result, video games could be considered as powerful mediators that are able to develop empathic responses in those who play them, mediating between realities and connecting them: the ones inhabited by players in their regular lives and those materialized in the universe of the game.

Empathy and identification are, to a certain extent, interdependent concepts. There could hardly be empathy without a process of, at least partial, identification with the reality that is being shown to us; on the other hand, identifying with someone or something requires a sense of empathy, the possibility to recognize oneself in the other – human or not – and their tribulations. In accord with De Waal (2009: 80), it is reasonably safe to affirm that if ‘identification with others opens the door for empathy, the absence of identification closes that door’. In fact, when it comes to video games, the player has more chance to develop their empathy when this ‘not only takes the perspective of another, but also begins to identify with the character represented’ (Bachen et al., 2012: 440).

These notions are difficult to disentangle but offer important nuances that contribute to advancing our understanding of how video games help players to connect with new realities. Beyond the similarities or interdependencies between identification and empathy, it is noticeable that the former has several implications when it comes to dealing with ideas of identity formation, a sense of belonging, group attachment, and subjectivity.

This provides an opportunity for players to develop empathy and identification processes, as well as a means to connect with situations and people, whether they are known or unfamiliar to us. Video games can serve as sophisticated escapism tools, but they can also open up many avenues to other aspects of reality, allowing us to (re)connect with it in unexpected ways. Thus, a thorough academic study of these themes is an exciting avenue that can be explored.