Literature and Videogames: Adaptation and Reciprocity/ *Literatura e Videogames: Adaptação e Reciprocidade*

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims to discuss the relation between Literature and Videogames by showing how the lifestyle of the postmodern man was, somehow, predicted by the literary production from the twentieth century, and how literature has offered support to the production of videogames narratives and other virtual programs that intend to represent reality. To this end, we have used he studies of James Naremore (2000) and Tania Pellegrini (2003), among others, to raise discussions toward the process of adaptation and reciprocity in the literary and virtual universe. The results point to a close relation between these two forms of expression and prove that the gamer culture has been taking its space and developing potentialities in individuals that few other methods can. Every year, elements that make impossibilities possible are developed in monumental speed. It is necessary to take into account such phenomena so they are not unnoticed. The physical reality adds to the virtual one and vice versa. This cycle will not end soon.

KEYWORDS: Literature; Videogame; Adaptation; Reciprocity

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo refletir sobre a relação Literatura e Videogame mostrando como o estilo de vida do homem pós-moderno, fora, de alguma forma, anunciada em obras literárias do século XX, e como a literatura tem oferecido subsídios para a produção de jogos e programas virtuais que têm a pretensão de representação do real. Para tanto, utilizamos os apontamentos de James Naremore (2000) e Tânia Pellegrini (2003), dentre outros, para levantar discussões acerca do processo de adaptação e reciprocidade no universo literário e comunicação visual.Os resultados apontam para uma estreita ligação entre essas duas formas de expressão.Também é possivel notar que a cultura gamer vem, a cada dia, tomando seu espaço e vai desenvolvendo nos indivíduos potencialidades que poucos métodos conseguem. A cada ano que passa, elementos que tornam possíveis a realização das impossibilidades surgem e evoluem em velocidade descomunal. E é necessário observar com mais atenção tais fenômenos, para que não passem despercebidos. A realidade física acresce à virtual e a virtual acresce à física. Este ciclo não se findará tão cedo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura; Videogame; Adaptação; Reciprocidade

1 Introduction

Technological advances have provided visible alterations in men's postmodern social practices. Among so many transformations, those related to communication seem to have been

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determinant for humanity to reach its current stage. Media has been responsible for the production of virtual worlds with realities nourished by the desires and intentions of its users which, most of the time, break the barriers of space and time while echoing the false impression of fact domination.

In this context, the real and the imaginary blend together, making life a fictional game in which the subject man transforms himself into characters that are, at the same time, real and imaginary, once they are a result of their own creation. In the endless struggle to create, time is the key element in the search for something infinite and indescribable, thus man appears to have lost reference in his searches, wishes and desires. *Facebook, WhatsApp*, among other communication channels, allow users a vast amount of tasks to be performed in a single space and time, generating a sensation of fulfilling and self-realization.

The so-called postmodern man has transformed his habits into practices similar to those we frequently see in the digital games or programs that aim, one way or another, to project human life through digital narratives as a verisimilitude of reality. In this perspective, this article aims at showing how the postmodern man lifestyle was somehow announced in literary works from the twentieth century and how literature has offered subsidies for the production of games and virtual shows intended to represent reality.

2 Adaptation – Brief Considerations

The adaptation process can be discussed in different aspects. The term *adaptation* has become popular in the cinematographic context to identify movies which were inspired by a literary work but it was not that explicit and the public could sometimes identify this semantic relation by the signs, posters, subtitles or formulas such as "adapted from…" or "inspired in the work of…". Critics were focused mostly on the different angles referring to betrayal, deformation, violation and vulgarization of the original piece, which would always lead to the discussions about infidelity.

It is perfectly acceptable that most current translations are considered adaptations, based on the assumption that every intervention, since the first moment of the translation of an original

piece until the work of dramatic rewriting, is a recreation. Therefore, the transfer of forms from a sign to the other is never innocent. Transforming or transposing a piece from a genre to another implies making an adaptation, whose object is a narrative content kept more or less faithful with sometimes considerable differences. The same does not occur when the discursive structure goes through a radical transformation, that is, when the enunciation device is entirely different from the original, for example, transposing a romance to the movies or to a game.

By adaptation we mean a transcription of equivalent language to a "substance transposition". This language transcription will alter the linguistic support used to tell a story. This alteration occurs at the moment in which a subject is expressed in another language within a creation process based on a major or minor seizing of the original piece. According to Derrida (*apud* NAREMORE, 2000, p. 45), "the film adaptation is not simply a faded imitation of a superior authentic original: it is a 'citation' grafted into a new context, and thereby inevitably refunctioned."

The relationship between literature and visual arts, games, and electronic media, for example, has received increasing interest from critics and theorists of the area. In this respect, Luís Camargo (2003, p. 9) affirms: "Literature is an integrating system of the broader cultural system, establishing several relationships with other arts and media". These relationships allow literature to be one of the main sources of inspiration for cinematographic and video game production. Through adaptation, several narratives are recreated and re-presented to the public as new due to the large amount of technological instruments favoring these recreations.

According to James Naremore (2000, p.44), "adaptation is part of a general theory of repetition, since narratives are indeed repeated in different ways and in distinct cultural or artistic means". In other words, some superficial structures like technological or virtual apparatus can bring different elements or meaning to an old narrative, however, if the semantic structure remains the same, such work will lead the audience to a trivial narrative.

Adaptations of literary works to audiovisual vehicles constitute a complex cultural process that has been the target of countless discussions, both due to its abstraction level and its innovative character. In this regard, Helio Guimarães (2003, p. 91) comments:

> The adaptation process therefore does not dry out in the transposition from the literary text to another vehicle. It can generate an almost infinite chain of references to other texts, constituting a cultural phenomenon involving dynamic processes of transfer, translation, and interpretation of meanings and historical-cultural values. (HÉLIO GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 91).

It is this transfer of historic-cultural values that allows the proliferation of several cinematographic narratives. One cannot expect a 21st century with the same images of the 19th century. This possibility of image changes was the greatest accomplishment of the cinema which, according to Tania Pellegrini et al. (2003, p. 19), "[…] will reflect on the modern narrative through assembly and collage techniques. This capacity of the cinema to assembly and collage enables an infinite number of productions".

Concerned with new narrative forms, Genette (1982) develops an investigation work that aims at analyzing the adaptation process as an intertextual dialogue in the production of new texts. Based on this work and the studies of Naremore (2000), which focus on the adaptation process of literary pieces to visual communication vehicles, a small approach on the main elements involved in this process will be carried out here.

If we observe the behavior of human being regarding technological advances through time, we will see that, among distrusts, hesitations and lack of access, there is always a tendency towards acceptance, which corroborates the idea that man is an adaptable being, regardless of time and space. Not only is man prone to self-adaptation, but also adaptation to the environment and the elements that comprise it. Computers, tablets and cellphones are clear examples of the adaptation capacity of the technological environment for the needs of the postmodern man.

Throughout this uncontrolled search for adaptation on behalf of comfort and the monopoly of time, history and interpersonal relationships are also affected because records start being perceived as much more real and reliable, since watching an event recorded through the lens of a camera or cellphone, for example, is a lot different from an only written record. In this context, human relationships have gained new tendencies, and the environments of meetings and bonding are modified and, once again, barriers of space and time are broken due to the ever increasing improvements of the virtual communication.

Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that man constantly live in *Inter-reality* – a term used here to express diversified actions of an individual in a virtual environment. In other words, inter-reality enables the restructuring of a series of actions, reactions, thoughts and productions that generate a different form of being by the individual, because virtual environment holds the capacity to perform tasks and achieve goals which, in the physical-real plane, would not be possible due to the space-time barrier. For the critic Naiara Araújo (2017), it is possible to affirm that several literary narratives that preceded the first stage of the industrial revolution during the middle 18th century were built through speculative futuristic projects that resemble the ideas nourished in the scientific communities of previous centuries. The novel *Utopia* by Thomas More (1516), for example, can be pointed as the first literary narrative with a scenario that emerges from the man's need to idealize, build and adapt its surrounding environment, transforming it in an ideal and perfect place. More's fiction dialogues with the techno-scientific inventions that surpass the space and time limits.

In this perspective, one can argue that virtual games are the practices that better approximate to the aimed lifestyle proposed by the new social context in which the postmodern man is. In an almost prophetic way, literature has anticipated this lifestyle in works such as: *New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon, *Somnium* (1634) by Johann Kepler, *True History* (1634) by Lucian de Samosata, *The Man in the Moone* (1638) by Francis Goldwin, *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun* (1656) by Cyrano de Bergerac, *Gulliver's Travels (1726)* by Jonathan Swift, *The Time Machine (1895)* and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) by H.G. Wells, *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley and *1984* by George Orwell, among others. According to the writer Cole Meyer (2017),

> In the modern age, literature is ubiquitous. And so are video games. Video games (successful ones, at least), like literature, have narrative. They have conflict, and tension, dialogue and characters. In some modern games, even, there isn't much difference between the game and a film, besides the fact that you, the player, must make decisions. In recent years, there have been arguments made on the literary merit of film, but the same argument has been made less often, and with less success, for video games. Far too often, video games are dismissed as mindless or a waste of time. There has been a kickback, recently, from the industry, mostly from independent studios whose designers view their work as art and understand the finer details of narrative structure (MEYER,2017, p.01).

To illustrate his argument, Meyer (2017) cites works such as *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter*, *Kentucky Route Zero*, *Fragments of Him*, *Braid*, *Papers, Please*, *Gone Home*, *The Witcher* series, *Spec Ops: The Line*, *Dante's Inferno*, *Alice: Madness Returns,* among others, whose narratives follow the same semantic structures present in consecrated literary works. Some of these games will be mentioned later.

When it comes to games, it is worth mentioning that their narratives are composed by multidisciplinary elements that contribute to a rich and complex dialogue. The relationship between Literature, video games and other fields has been a constant discussion in the last decades, either due to the need to establish frontiers or to the fact that the postmodern man has an ever increasing multifaceted and liquid identity. In the constant search for the comprehension of man in different moments of history, Literature has been trying to describe him through his relationship with others and with the environment. The ease that Literature has in dialoguing with other forms of art has proportionated a multiplicity of adaptations and rewritings of the present society. Geography, History, Philosophy, Sociology, Cinema, Anthropology, Religion and so many other forms of knowledge are always present explicitly or implicitly in the literary pieces as a primary or secondary element, demonstrating that man does not exist on his own and his acts depend on external factors.

The idea of analyzing literature and other artistic-cultural representations through interdisciplinary relations emerged not only by the need to show that man and his actions are a fruit of the environment, but that these actions can be seen and analyzed using different concepts and ideologies. If we take Zygmunt Bauman's points regarding the "culture of the modern liquid world" as an example, we will have the idea of a fragmented man, whose culture and identity are in a constant transformation and adaptation process which, as mentioned before, relates to the dynamics presented in games and has a strict relationship with literary narratives, as we shall see soon.

3 Literature and Games: Reciprocal Relationship

Literature was and still is an important source of inspiration to create the plot, environment, characters and their representations within a game. Game history is marked by the influence of literary narratives, even when there is no visible connection. For the journalist Daniel Solyszko:

> [...] videogames have gained market space appealing to one of the most ancient amusements: literature. The game *Device 6*, winner of the latest *Apple Design Awards* is one of the most successful examples of this new Strand that finds in Brazil its third largest audience on the planet: 45 million users. As in a romance, *Device 6* develops accordingly to the main character, Anna, which was up without memory in a castle and tries to discover how she ended up there. Throughout six chapters, the game mixes references of Franz Kafka and Lewis Carroll using the text in creative ways with sentences moving on the screen in different ways (SOLYSZKO, 2015, p.01).

Especially in the early 1970s with the first videogame console in history, *Odyssey* 100, the partnership between literature and videogames began to become more intense. In this period, games such as *Space Invaders* (1978) and *Lunar Lander* (1978) were produced inspired by the H.G. Wells' literary works. According to Araújo (2017), 1978 was an important year for the videogame and Literature partnership and this can be easily seen by the titles of the games which sometimes borrow parts of the original title or simply as a way to pay homage to the literary work or its author: *Othello*, *Space Invaders*, *Space Wars, Lunar Lander*, are examples of this relationship of complicity.

The decades of 1980 and 1990 were also marked by the rising of several games inspired by literary pieces. In 1984, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by INFOCOM was inspired by the works of Douglas Adams, whose contribution was beyond literary works; the writer also helped to idealize and develop the game's plot. In 1988, the known book *The doctor and the monster* by Robert Louis Stevenson was transformed in a game, which caused a frenzy among gamers. Even though this adaptation was not intended to follow the literary narrative strictly, the loan was well accepted by the genera fans. Using a technique that contemplates dynamism and hyper texting, the producer dares to project a hybrid main character, a confluence of Huck with Dr. Jekyll, which wanders through the city towards his marriage, but is blocked by people and animals. While being upset, his anger increases as he transforms himself into Mr. Hyde and needs

to confront several creatures to continue his path. The game's dialogue with the Incredible Hulk from the comic books and movie screens becomes an even greater attraction for the videogame lovers.

In 1992, another Literature classic is adapted to videogame screens. *Duna* by Frank Herbert, which narrates the political confrontation between three noble families in a futuristic Earth. Differently from *The doctor and the monster*, the game *Duna* presents the same conducting wire of the literary piece, though it adds elements of strategic effects to increase dynamicity during the game. Following the same adaptation line, we can also cite the games *Parasite Eve* (1998), *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* (1998) and *The Wheel of Time* (1999).

The 21st century has brought sophisticated versions and adaptations, as expected. In 2000, gamers are presented with a thrilling *American McGee's Alice,* inspired by Lewis Carroll's novel, but with a higher violent content than the aforementioned. The game brings a more bizarre, bloody, and violent version of Carroll's characters: a psychopath Alice, a homicidal Queen of Hearts, and a crazy hatter, among other characters whose identities are twisted. Public approval enabled the production of a sequel in 2011 titled *Alice: Madness Return*. In addition, other absolute successes produced thanks to the partnership between Literature and videogames were *Dante's Inferno* (2010), based on the classic novel by Dante Aliguieri, *Divine Comedy,* and *Middle-earth: Shadows of Mordor* (2014), based on the narratives by J. R. R. Tolkien.

In this visible and sustainable relation between literature and games, it is important to highlight that several consecrated literary works are constantly visited by game producers, even though there are no explicit references. *Neuromancer*, a master piece of cyberpunk by William Gibson, which portrays the future in a technologically developed society, is present in *Bioshock*, a title that narrates about the technological advances of an underwater and almost dead city. Another example is *Cyberpunk 2077,* which is clearly inspired by the aforementioned novel for dealing with corruption, mechatronics, robotics, and technological advances.

If it is true that the game industry has benefited from the literary narratives as an inspiration source, it is also true that games have been inspiring writers from around the world to construct their literary narratives. An example of this new tendency are novels such as: the seven book saga *Assassin's Creed*, which had its first book published in 2011, and the series *Diablo*,

comprising four books, the first of which was published in 2012. Among an extensive list, we can also cite *Battlerfied: the Russion, God of War, Halo, World of Warcraft, Star Craft, Uncharted,* and *Mass Effect.* Referring to this new production phase, Tania Pellegrini (2003, p. 16) comments:

> Living on the margin within this colored cultural and changing universe, whose reproduction and placement depend on a sophisticated technological apparatus, the literary text suffers sensible transformations expressed in a type of dialogue, whose marks are clear in its own writing.

This reciprocal declaration also involves other environments. In the last decades, cinema and comic books have also gained their game versions, as is the case of S*tar Wars, Batman, Matrix, Constantine*, and *Medal of Honor.* The last one was created by Steven Spielberg, inspired by the box office success *Saving Private Ryan.* In this context, we perceive that the modern ways of artistic production and entertaining tend to intertwine in a constant symbiotic process. In Bauman's words (2013, p. 107):

> The best of contemporary arts (in effect, what is more seminal and effective in the performance of its cultural role) consists on the last instance, in several steps in the endless process of interpreting the common experience and offering effective invitations to a dialogue – or, in this sense, an ever wider polygon.

Following this line of thought, literature constitutes an important foundation for this recent phenomenon, generated by virtual games, as it presents the narrative structures for the adaptation process. In a game, the player runs into a similar experience to that of reading a book: navigating through deep narratives by inserting himself/herself in them; being an active participant in the story created (and not just a reader); taking part in the ideologies contained in the game and also being transformed by them; settling great historical events from mankind. All this is enabled by the most modern videogame productions.

Final considerations

The contemporary reader's role has extended in several competence levels. We now talk about an active reader, capable of making intertextual reads and discussing themes presented in

several languages, texts, and speeches. Virtual games, for example, offer the reader/gamer the possibility to be, at the same time, active and passive in a constant construction, creation and recreation process in which the user is an integrative part of the narrative.

Contemporary artistic production presents to the reader a multifaceted literary speech in which verbal language articulates with nonverbal one and the latter modifies the first, explicitly or not to the reader's eyes. With the cinema and photography inventions, the perception of the world has expanded and, consequently, its representation. These expressive changes in production and cultural reproduction modes are visibly expressed in the literary text.

In the last decades, efforts have been concentrated in investigating processes that involve the use of literary texts by the visual communication media. For a long time, the adaptation process was in the center of discussions. The transformation of a literary work in a cinematographic or soap opera super productions was a theme in several studies that emphasized, mainly, fidelity notions. The basic assumption tied to the fidelity notion was that the more faithful to the literary text, the better the adaptation. Thus, a superior level was attributed to the original piece compared to its adaptation. The former would always be better than the latter.

For some critics, these visions deny the inner nature of a literary text, which is the possibility of raising diverse interpretations and gaining new senses with time. In this way, "the idea of fidelity supposes, for example, that a TV show faithful to the literary text can in some way replace it, taking its place and making it obsolete" (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 95). According to Pellegrini (2003, p. 17), this conception reduces the artistic value of the literary work and reveals the extreme adhesion to the mass culture values.

One cannot deny that inter-reality is a part of man's habits in the postmodern age and tends to modify the lifestyle of the future generations. The 21st century has enabled paradigm shifts and an extension of freedom of speech. It was foreseen that technological advances would dramatically modify man's behavior and would lead to the creation of new labels and tendencies based in digital narratives in several sectors. Literature still enables different reads and adaptations, both for games and the cinema.

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