

# Games and Utopia

Michał Kłosiński

**Michał Kłosiński, Ph.D.**

University of Silesia in Katowice  
Faculty of Philology  
Plac Sejmu Śląskiego 1  
40-001 Katowice  
Poland  
[michal.klosinski@us.edu.pl](mailto:michal.klosinski@us.edu.pl)



Dr Michał Kłosiński, assistant professor at The Faculty of Philology, University of Silesia. An active member of: Utopian Studies Society and The Society for Utopian Studies, during his doctoral studies he received a research grant from The National Science Centre and participated in the Paris Program in Critical Theory. He published various articles on Polish literature, literary theory, video games and utopias in: „International Journal of Baudrillard Studies”, „Teksty Drugie”, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, „Wielogłos”, „FA-art”, „Świat i Słowo”, „Śląskie Studia Polonistyczne”. He is the author of: Świat pęknięty. O poemach naiwnych Czesława Miłosza [Broken World. On „World. Naive poem” by Czesław Miłosz] (Warsaw 2013) and Ratunkiem jest tylko poezja Baudrillard – Teoria – Literatura [Only poetry can save us. Baudrillard – Theory – Literature] (Warsaw 2015). He also co-edited More After More. Essays Commemorating the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More’s Utopia (2016 with Ksenia Olkusz and Krzysztof M. Maj) and Ekonomiczne teorie literatury [Economic theories of literature] (with Paweł Tomczok). He is currently working on a book about literary and philosophical critique of video games in the context of utopianism.

**ABSTRACT:**

The main theme of my article is the relationship between virtual worlds of video games and the concept of utopia. I aim to present a wide variety of different definitions and theories of utopia, which seem indispensable in order to further the relationship between video game and virtual reality research and the multitude of utopian studies discourses. The thesis starts with a short recollection of Alexander Galloway’s thesis on video games and utopias from his article on World of Warcraft which I am trying to supplement with some of the most interesting contemporary utopian studies research. The core of the article focuses on sketching an alternative proposal which includes a variety of definitions of utopia and utopianism. My aim is to introduce precise and useful notions which could be further utilized in game analysis and game research.

**KEY WORDS:**

digital games, game studies, magic circle, utopia, utopian studies, utopianism, video games.

## Introduction

One of the first articles about the problematics of utopia and video games is *Warcraft and Utopia* written by Alexander Galloway. In his study we can find some interesting research findings: “An argument can be made that all video games are, at a certain level, utopian projects, simply because all video games create worlds in which certain laws are simulated and certain other laws are no longer simulated. The freedom to selectively simulate, then, operates in a video game as the most important scaffolding for utopia. Further, multiplayer games instantiate (both materially and interpersonally) a utopian space in ways not seen in previous media, for the diegetic world itself is larger than the imaginative plane of any given player [...]”<sup>1</sup> “[...] virtual worlds are always in some basic way the expression of utopian desire, and in doing so they present the very impossibility of imagining utopia; this is not simply a kneejerk ontological paradox, that code utopias, being immaterial, formal, and virtual, are by definition not »real,« but that the very act of creating an immaterial utopian space at the same time inscribes a whole vocabulary of algorithmic coding into the plane of imagination that thereby undoes the play of utopia in the first place.”<sup>2</sup>

Galloway constructs his reflection by relating to Fredric Jameson, who – after Ernst Bloch, assumes a twofold understanding of utopia: as a program and as an impulse. A program can be found in any systemic form of utopia: a detailed description of a city, society, a revolutionary political practice, intentional community or projects of total city spaces.<sup>3</sup> Whereas an impulse can be seen in such forms as: political theory, reform, a singular building or allegories of collectivity, time and body.<sup>4</sup> Bloch’s project is a hermeneutic

1 GALLOWAY, A. R.: *Warcraft and Utopia*. In *Ctheory*, 2006, Vol. 2, No. 16. [online]. [2018-03-25]. Available at: <<https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14501/5342>>.

2 Ibidem, p. 6.

3 JAMESON, F.: *Archaeologies of the Future The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005, p. 2-5.

4 Ibidem, p. 5-7.

one, and as such, it focuses on interpreting elements and figures, which express desires in various media.<sup>5</sup> Thus, by following Jameson and Bloch, Galloway points to one of the most important aspects of the contemporary utopian theory linked with its Marxist roots, which in brief can be defined as searching for alternatives to the social, economic and political ideology of late capitalism or neoliberalism. This view has also been reinforced in an article on the critical power of virtual dystopias written by Marcus Schulzke, who wrote that: "Despite the many benefits virtual worlds may offer their users, they also recreate real-world problems, and this further detracts from virtual worlds' prospects as critical utopias."<sup>6</sup> Schulzke's view is different than Galloway's in that it focuses on the critical potential of virtual utopias, but he also seems to only focus on these worlds which "challenge the status quo"<sup>7</sup> of real world problems. By doing so Schulzke seems to miss the point of Bloch's reading of utopian impulse as a simple but powerful expression of a dream about an alternative. My point is to present a broader view on utopianism in video games and virtual worlds as I do not believe the lack of explicit critical orientation makes a specific utopian vision less productive or lowers its potential in producing an alternative, hope or desire. The second quotation shows that Galloway's intention is to present the immaterial utopia of the virtual world as a project doomed to failure, as it subjects the imaginary space of social desires to formal totality of the code. Therefore, he says that no virtual utopia will ever be able to create an alternative to neoliberalism, because it is based on the same totality of the code<sup>8</sup> which lies at the heart of the mechanisms of financial capitalism.

On one hand, Galloway is correct in saying that virtual utopias of video games uncover the very impossibility of imagining utopia. On the other hand, he seems to ignore the most important aspect of utopian hermeneutics by focusing on criticizing the total program underlying utopia. By saying that every game can be understood as a utopian project just because it depicts a world in which certain laws and rules are simulated and certain are not, Galloway reaches the level of generalization at which posing the question about the utopianism of video games is no longer valid or constructive. It seems necessary to modify his position in order to depict how video game research can benefit from utopian theory and vice versa.

## Definitions of utopia

It might prove useful to contrast Galloway's reflection about utopia with one of the most well-known presentations of different definitions of the genre proposed by the founding father of contemporary utopian studies, Lyman Tower Sargent (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sargent's definitions of utopian studies terms

Term	Definition
<b>Utopianism</b>	social dreaming
<b>Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.

5 BLOCH, E.: *The Principle of Hope. Volume 2*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 1995, p. 794-834.

6 SCHULZKE, M.: The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias. In *Games and Culture*, 2014, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 7.

7 Ibidem, p. 8.

8 LAZZARATO, M.: *Signs and machines. Capitalism and the production of subjectivity*. London : Semiotext(e), 2014, p. 40-41.

<b>Eutopia or positive Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lives.
<b>Dystopia or negative Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lives.
<b>Utopian satire</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society.
<b>Anti-utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.
<b>Critical Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the Utopian genre.

Source: SARGENT, L. T.: *The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited*. In *Utopian Studies*, 1994, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 9.

To begin with, the notion of utopianism can be utilized in video game analysis in its current form as it seems to be universally applicable to all media specific forms. Utopianism concerns game developers, players and virtual worlds as it questions and problematizes the expression of specific social desires and their realization in video games. Moreover, Sargent's definitions show a discursive difference between Galloway's reflection and theoretical proposals of *utopian studies* researchers. For example, in the first quote Galloway mistakes utopia with allotopia (another place),<sup>9</sup> as he ignores the fact, that creation of another world does not make that world a utopia. This distinction allows us to put forward a thesis that virtual worlds are allotopias at large, but only some of them can be characterized as utopian in view of their social dimension. Sargent's list of definitions has to be modified, as it focuses on literary utopias and the triadic relationship between the author, the non-existent society, and the reader. In order for these to depict the problematic nature of video games we have to replace the concept of the author with the notion of the producer, as we no longer have to deal with a singular intention, but with teamwork and a more complex development process. The second, obvious conversion concerns the reader, which has to be replaced by the player, thus bringing to the utopian problematic questions about the agency, control, ability to influence the shape of the social relations etc. With just these two small changes we get a slightly updated list of utopian definitions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Updated list of utopian terms definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Utopianism</b>	social dreaming
<b>Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space

9 MAJ, K. M.: *Allotopie. Topografie światów fikcyjnych*. Kraków : Universitas, 2015, p. 35.

<b>Eutopia or positive Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the producer/developer intended a contemporaneous player to view as considerably better than the society in which that player lives
<b>Dystopia or negative Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the producer/developer intended a contemporaneous player to view as considerably worse than the society in which that player lives
<b>Utopian satire</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the producer/developer intended a contemporaneous player to view as a criticism of that contemporary society
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<b>Critical Utopia</b>	a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the producer/developer intended a contemporaneous player to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the Utopian genre

Source: own processing

It becomes clear that in order to speak about utopia in a video game it is necessary to question whether it depicts or describes a non-existent society and locates it in time and space, but also – whether the structure and shape of this society can be changed by the player. In this sense, games such as *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*<sup>10</sup> or *League of Legends*<sup>11</sup> do not meet the basic condition of utopian fiction, as they are devoid of detailed depictions of society and the player is not invested in social problems. Quite contrary, games such as *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*,<sup>12</sup> *SimCity 5*<sup>13</sup> or *The Witcher 3*<sup>14</sup> are not only presenting different worlds, but with their detailed depiction of non-existent social structure, they can be further analyzed from the utopian perspective, which is strictly linked with the players evaluation of society represented in game: is it better or worse, it is a critique of the contemporary society he or she knows; does it attack a specific utopian vision or play with the genre by questioning its basic assumptions? Furthermore, video games constitute a substantial innovation in classical utopian studies, as their producers offer the players a meaningful way of reshaping the non-existent society in the virtual world. The potential to problematize certain utopian questions has already been proven in various interpretations of games such as *BioShock*,<sup>15</sup> *Dishonored*<sup>16</sup> and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. Those games would perfectly fit the category of critical utopia or dystopia, as they clearly confront the players with utopian reflection and questions about the shape of a good society.

10 VALVE CORPORATION, HIDDEN PATH ENTERTAINMENT: *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (computer version)*. [digital game]. Bellevue, WA : Valve Corporation, 2017.  
 11 RIOT GAMES: *League of Legends (computer version)*. [digital game]. Los Angeles, CA : Riot Games, 2017.  
 12 IDOS MONTRÉAL: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution (computer version)*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Square Enix, 2011.  
 13 MAXIS: *SimCity 5 (computer version)*. [digital game]. Redwood City, CA : Electronic Arts, 2013.  
 14 CD PROJEKT RED: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (computer version)*. [digital game]. Warszawa : CD Projekt Red, 2015.  
 15 2K BOSTON: *BioShock (computer version)*. [digital game]. Novato, CA : 2K Games, 2007.  
 16 ARKANE STUDIOS: *Dishonored (computer version)*. [digital game]. Rockville, MA : Bethesda Softworks, 2012.

The structural definitions proposed by Sargent are not the only way of looking at the problem of utopia in video games. In his work, Galloway related to Jameson, whose theory offers a new perspective and poses different research questions. The innovation here lies in Bloch's utopian hermeneutics, which focuses not on specific programs (described by Sargent), but singular, mostly allegorical elements in which utopian desires are expressed<sup>17</sup> – in this particular case in video games, in *game studies* theory and specific ludic problems. Therefore, Jameson allows us to understand, that even research perspectives and notions such as: Janet Murray's immersion,<sup>18</sup> Gordon Calleja's incorporation,<sup>19</sup> Gonzalo Frasca's games of the oppressed<sup>20</sup> or Edvard Castronova's synthetic worlds<sup>21</sup> theory, that these concepts may be interpreted as expressions of utopian impulse about the ontological status of the player and virtual worlds. Searching for utopian impulse does not mean rejecting Sargent's definitions, on the contrary, it is very useful in supplementing the social critique of programs with questions about such elements as, for example: the system of upgrading the characters in video games, which can be treated as an allegory of bodily and temporal imagination inscribed in games and realized by the players. Utopian impulse would thus be visible in various representations and mechanics used in character creation, for example in the augment system presented in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, or in the game items – such as the steampunk heart allowed to hear the citizen's emotions and pain in *Dishonored*. These examples show that the problem of utopian impulse in video games is also dependent on the way the players utilize specific gameplay mechanics, as we could speak about realizing utopian impulse when one decides to finish *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* or *Dishonored* in a non-lethal way.

## Three modes of utopia by Ruth Levitas

One of the most interesting approaches to the problem of utopia, which again relates to Bloch is Ruth Levitas's IROS project. In her book *Utopia as method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* she differentiates three entangled modes of utopia understood: as ontology, archeology and architecture<sup>22</sup>. Before we go into a detailed description of these three modes, it might be useful to recollect some of the useful insights Levitas gives in her understanding of utopia: “[...] utopia does not require the imaginative construction of whole other worlds. It occurs as an embedded element in a wide range of human practice and culture – in the individual and collective creative practices of art as well as in its reproduction and consumption”.<sup>23</sup>

In a nutshell, Levitas shows that the notion of utopia, and precisely – utopianism – is not limited to construction of “whole other worlds” (or allotopias), but that it can be defined as an individual or collective social practice, and that we can search for utopias in

17 BLOCH, E.: *The Principle of Hope. Volume 1*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 1995, p. 144-150.  
 18 For more information, see: MURRAY, J.: *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge : The MIT Press, 1997.  
 19 CALLEJA, G.: *In-Game. From Immersion to Incorporation*. London : The MIT Press, 2011, p. 168-170.  
 20 FRASCA, G.: Rethinking agency and immersion: video games as a means of consciousness-raising. In *Digital Creativity*, 2004, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 167-169.  
 21 CASTRONOVA, E.: *Synthetic worlds. The business and culture of online games*. Chicago, London : The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 148.  
 22 LEVITAS, R.: *Utopia as Method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 183.  
 23 Ibidem, p. 5.

each and every culture, as utopianism is the very sense of longing and the desire of fulfillment.<sup>24</sup> It might be interesting to show that Levitas's definition can be supplemented with Johan Huizinga's observation that play is crucial for culture formation: "The view we take in the following pages is that culture arises in the form of play, that it is played from the very beginning".<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, researching relations between the concept of the magic circle and utopia is strictly linked with (utopian) hermeneutics of video games, which sees utopian impulse in social practices such as production, reproduction and consumption of virtuality. Moreover, Levitas stresses that contemporary culture is saturated with non-allotopian utopianism, which brings us to the very concept of the magic circle, as it is a space organized collectively or individually in order to play. Huizinga writes: "The turf, the tennis-court, the chessboard and pavement-hopsotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle. The striking similarity between sacrificial rites all over the earth must be rooted in a very fundamental, an aboriginal layer of the human mind."<sup>26</sup> In the wake of Huizinga's definition, it is crucial to ask in what sense video game virtuality delimits a field of utopian desire and longing – a magic circle. If contemporary culture is saturated with utopianism than we should ask to what extent video games contribute to this process, in what sense they express longing and desire for fulfillment projected by our culture, and to what measure desire and longing describe us as their subjects. When analyzing video games we are entitled to utilize utopian hermeneutics or utopian method (as Levitas calls it) to constantly ask ourselves about our desires and our sense of lack and longing.

The crucial point of Levitas's thinking about utopia as an imaginary reconstitution of society (IROS) is the differentiation of three entangled modes of utopia: as ontology, archeology and architecture.<sup>27</sup> Levitas stresses that utopia always takes the issue of human nature and existence. In this ontological mode utopia is a method of analysis of the human condition, law, ethics, relationship with the other etc. This aspect of utopian ontology can be seen in the problems of change, transformation as well as in the establishment of rules for players and their relationships with others. Here, the question of utopian ontology relates to the understanding of the concept of the magic circle proposed by Jakko Stenros and Arlete dos Santos Petry as a metaphor,<sup>28</sup> social contract<sup>29</sup> or liminal experience,<sup>30</sup> in short – a mechanism delimiting the virtual space for this ontological laboratory – both for game developers and for players. Analysis of video games in this perspective is linked with inquiring if – and consequently – how video games produce a new utopian ontology and what is the vision of human being and its nature that they project and work through? In this sense designing moral choices in rich story games such as *Tyranny*,<sup>31</sup> *Fallout 4*,<sup>32</sup> *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Dishonored* or *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*<sup>33</sup> constitutes an ideal field of study of how video games present the possibilities proper to the human being seen as an individual performing choices which are subjected to ethical and moral evaluation. Furthermore, the aforementioned games evaluate the player's choices according to a strict

24 Ibidem.

25 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London : Routledge, 1980, p. 46.

26 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London : Routledge, 1980, p. 20.

27 LEVITAS, R.: *Utopia as Method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 183.

28 DOS SANTOS PETRY, A.: The concept of magic circle: a critical reading. In *Obra Digital*, 2013, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 39.

29 Ibidem, p. 43.

30 Ibidem, p. 45.

31 OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT: *Tyranny (computer version)*. [digital game]. Stockholm : Paradox Interactive, 2016.

32 BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS: *Fallout 4 (computer version)*. [digital game]. Rockville, MA : Bethesda Softworks, 2015.

33 BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (computer version)*. [digital game]. Rockville, MD : Bethesda Softworks, 2011.

axiom of good and evil linked with a mechanics attributing value to actions in the game, which are in turn rewarded or punished (such is the role of: karma system in *Fallout*, loyalty in *Tyranny* or humanitarianism in *Dishonored* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*). This specific aspect of story rich games has been described by Rafał Kochanowicz as "a play with values".<sup>34</sup> This Polish researcher shows that the moral dimension becomes the subject of gameplay in many contemporary titles, which allows us to see in them – in Levitas's terms – greater complexity of utopian ontological problems and reflection about human nature.

Two remaining modes of utopia are archeology and architecture. Levitas writes that: "Utopia as archaeology entails the imaginary reconstitution of the models of the good society underpinning policy, politics and culture, exposing them to scrutiny and critique".<sup>35</sup> The researcher sheds some light on a very significant aspect of utopia, also stressed in the title of Fredric Jameson's book, namely the drive to the archeology of the future, which in the case of video game and magic circle problems concerns especially the critical reading of various social models inscribed in them and construed with their help. Utopian archeology is possible only when one clearly delimits what spaces and places inside magical circles can be characterized as utopian models built upon contemporary legal, political and social arrangements. It is thus vital to see that utopian archeology will concern both the virtual space inside a magical circle, in example a city built in *SimCity*, a model of society presented in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, but also a characteristic discourse used to describe video games as places utilized to create utopias. or when the utopian discourse describes the very character of gameplay, like in *Fallout 4* in which the advertisement states that: "As the sole survivor of Vault 111, you enter a world destroyed by nuclear war. Only you can determine the fate of the Wasteland".<sup>36</sup> The key factor for utopian archeology is its critical approach, which is why every hermeneutical reconstruction of a good society has to be supplemented by the hermeneutics of suspicion. Levitas writes that the idea of archeology is always the venture point for thinking about alternative projects, and that is precisely why she says that contemporary utopian archeology is the archeology of capitalism.<sup>37</sup> This perspective allows us to treat magical circle and virtuality as a space for thinking about historical transformations of imaginary and discourses about good society. Thus the magic circle can be seen as a utopian space *per se*, like in Bernard Suit's vision presented in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, in which he argues that playing games is a condition sine qua non for Utopia.<sup>38</sup> The last mode of utopia described by Levitas is architecture, she writes: "Utopia as architecture is its culturally most familiar mode: imagining a reconstructed world and describing its social institutions. This is the terrain of utopian fiction. It is also the mode anti-utopians like best, keeping the possibility of living differently safely bound between book covers."<sup>39</sup>

Utopian architecture is closely related to video games as long as the magic circle delimits a space for thinking about rebuilding the world and reorganizing the social institutions that function within this world. It should not escape our attention that Levitas stresses their detailed description as a very important element of utopian fiction. Researching video games from this perspective entails posing questions about the shape and function of specific social institutions depicted in them, for example: the vision of media in *Deus*

34 KOCHANOWICZ, R.: *Fabularyzowane gry komputerowe w przestrzeni humanistycznej. Analizy, interpretacje i wnioski z pogranicza poetyki, aksjologii, dydaktyki literatury*. Poznań : Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2014, p. 128-129.

35 LEVITAS, R.: *Utopia as Method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 154.

36 *Official Fallout Homepage*. [online]. [2018-03-26]. Available at: <<https://fallout.bethesda.net/>>.

37 LEVITAS, R.: *Utopia as Method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 183.

38 SUITS, B.: *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Peterborough : Broadview Press, 2005, p. 149-160.

39 Ibidem, p. 197.

Ex: Human Revolution, representation of public facilities in SimCity 5 or the character of social institutions of the utopian city<sup>40</sup> of Columbia in *Bioshock Infinite*.<sup>41</sup> It should not be forgotten that video games and virtual worlds can themselves be seen as utopian spaces. This fact has been noted by Edward Castronova in his characteristic of institutions and laws governing synthetic worlds<sup>42</sup> coupled with analysis of their functioning as alternative worlds precisely because they are spaces of pleasure and play. Video games offer all three elements which Levitas sees as crucial in thinking about utopia: a critique of social reality as such – utopian archeology; almost infinite potential for designing alternative social, political and economic order – utopian architecture; and a re-definition of being human, ethics and morality – utopian ontology. Video game virtuality thus seems a utopian project by the very structure of its design although the tool itself can be utilized to create games about dystopias, anti-utopias, critical utopias, or any other form or allotopia. What I am trying to emphasize here is the utopianism of video game virtuality and not a critique of its byproducts.

Video games also constitute something unseen before in utopian film, literature or architecture. They are laboratories which allow us to simulate consequences of different social, political and economic policies in real time. Schulzke writes: "Games can constrain players' choices in ways that force players to take certain actions in order to progress through the narrative. When the constraints that structure a game are closely related to the problems the dystopia is designed to express, then those mechanics can draw players into the underlying logic that governs the dystopian world and cause players to become participants in creating dystopia."<sup>43</sup> This makes video games not only a tool for social dreaming, but also a tool of changing outcomes and seeing the evolution of utopian (or dystopian) desire. Edward Castronova in his works pointed to the fact, that virtual reality is already being used as a tool for creating alternative social order, policies, laws and economy which slowly influences society outside of virtuality. This movement towards change via virtual reality is both a manifestation of escapism, and a struggle to find an alternative to our contemporary societal problems. This only shows that social dreaming and utopian impulse have found a very interesting bio-political sphere in which millions of people constantly redefine what it means to live in a good society, how this society should work and compare their utopian desires with the current state of affairs. Video games are thus not only a laboratory, but a very strong facility for the education of social, political and economic desires both in virtual game-spaces and in Second Life, which in turn creates a dialectic of reality and virtuality leading to revolutionary changes in social structure.

40 See also: PÉREZ-LATORREL, O., OLIVA, M.: Video Games, Dystopia, and Neoliberalism: The Case of BioShock Infinite. In *Games and Culture*, 2017, Vol. 12, No. 6. [online]. [2018-03-26]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412017727226>>.

41 IRRATIONAL GAMES: *Bioshock Infinite (computer version)*. [digital game]. Novato, CA : 2K Games, 2013.

42 CASTRONOVA, E.: *Synthetic worlds. The business and culture of online games*. Chicago, London : The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 262.

43 SCHULZKE, M.: The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias. In *Games and Culture*, 2014, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 13-14.

## Conclusion

*Utopian studies* approach is presented in a very rough way in this paper, barely sketches some research problems for analysis and interpretation of video games. On the one hand it is crucial to rethink the very basic question of the relation between utopian representations of society in games and the affordances given to players, who might be able to reshape the social institutions, norms and laws governing virtual worlds. The notions used in video game studies discourse allow us to broaden the variety of utopian problems by questioning the role and character of specific game structures and mechanics which engage players in reflection about the shape of politics, economy and value systems in video games. These structural approaches allow for a better characterization of social representations in the context of existing utopian genres. Whereas poststructural and hermeneutic utopian theories focus on showing that games offer a completely new way of presenting both utopian programs and impulses or allegories which express social desires. Three modes of utopia taken from Ruth Levitas make us realize that the problems of utopian ontology, architecture and archeology may be analyzed as constitutive elements of certain video games. By linking the reflection from both utopian and game studies both disciplines can greatly enrich not only their research material but also the methods and perspectives of media specific analysis and interpretation.

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