



UDK 7.038.53

DOI 10.51937/Amfiteater-2024-2/68-89

Abstract

The article is based on Alexander R. Galloway's gaming theory, which was developed to analyse the action-based medium of video games and its specificities. Performed by the operator and the machine, the gaming actions of the game system take place in both the diegetic space of the game and in the real or non-diegetic space of the system. With his theory, Galloway pointed to the dimensions of acting in video games that elude narratological approaches. In doing so, he foregrounded the effects of the machine. Through a detailed analysis of Srečo Dragan's new media artworks, the article builds on Galloway's interpretation, in which he focuses mainly on modified video games and net. art, thereby raising the question of the universality of the theorist's analytical model for understanding new media cultural objects that appear two decades later and are developed on new technological platforms of mixed reality. It turns out that the four types of game actions are an effective tool for learning about the functioning of a new media artwork and the basis for its precise description, which can serve in the sustainable preservation and future reconstructions of this type of unstable art.

Keywords: video game studies, new media art, augmented reality, game action, diegesis, interface, Alexander R. Galloway, Srečo Dragan

Narvika Bovcon is a professor of video and new media art. She teaches at the Faculty of Computer and Information Science and as an external collaborator at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, both at the University of Ljubljana. Her research interests include user interfaces for exhibitions on interactive online platforms and virtual- and augmented-reality environments, the theory and practice of new media art, information visualisation and digital humanities. Since 2016, she has been the editor-in-chief of the journal *Art Words*.

narvika.bovcon@fri.uni-lj.si

Narvika Bovcon

Faculty of Computer and Information Science, University of Ljubljana

Summary

An analysis of Srečo Dragan's new media art projects with concepts from Alexander R. Galloway's theory of gaming (playing video games) shows how very different art projects include aspects of play. Although the algorithmic cultural object of the video game has changed from the first publication of Galloway's study in 2005 to the present – both due to the emergence of new technological possibilities and from the point of view of its role in the computerised society – Galloway's distinctly hybrid theoretical model of game actions remains interesting. Its main contribution to the understanding of the structure of actions involved in gaming is the breakdown of playing (or of interactions in new media art projects) into two groups of actions: the actions of the machine and the actions of the participant. On the other hand, it distinguishes between actions that take place in the diegetic space of the game and non-diegetic actions. At the same time, Galloway bases these coordinates of the understanding of game actions in the tradition of humanistic (philosophical, anthropological) discussions about the game as a complex human activity.

The article first focuses on Galloway's game actions and presents their concrete manifestations in video games in more detail to make them better understood and more easily recognisable in the text's analytical part. The extraction of individual game actions in new media art projects is indeed complicated, as the actions complement, layer and trigger each other. Galloway's mnemotechnic tool that offers the four types of action as a formalised structure is supplemented with their illustrations in detailed examples and explicated further in their role of allegories of human activities as found in discourses by authors such as Caillois, Huizinga, Geertz and Derrida.

The article's analytical part deals with the diverse oeuvre of the new media artist Srečo Dragan. In his artistic creation, which spans over six decades, we see a recognisable author's approach to inventing new modes of interaction with information technologies. Dragan invents game dispositifs, in which the participant, when interacting with technological interfaces, follows a script that reveals the operation of the technology. In the next step, the participant reflects and articulates his own

experience of the interaction in connection with his mental and experiential archive. The participant thus directs his diegetic action in this artistic game towards himself, and through this action, consequently changes and socialises himself regarding the experienced topic. Through detailed analyses of selected art projects, we want to confirm our opening hypothesis that, in addition to the artistic modifications of existing gaming conventions discussed by Galloway, it is possible to invent artistically conceptualised game actions.

The text focuses on Dragan's artistic projects, which build upon interface metaphors (a time tunnel, a memory room and a dialogue with an intelligent computer) from the film *2011: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick. It pays particular attention to Dragan's *Time Tunnel 2* from 2023, which consists of three units of dispositifs in mixed reality: in the first dispositif, the participant walks through augmented reality and operates a virtual model; in the second, the participant controls the brain interface, and in the third, the participant marks spatial mappings on a geometric grid on paper. The article's author explains the three experiential devices from the point of view of game actions. As a whole, they connect through mappings between the patterns of social structure, interface experience and thought. The inventory of all the interface elements on the devices in the project and their functions from the point of view of the game actions is an important document about the functioning of the art project in a given implementation. New media artworks are technologically conditioned and, therefore, unstable and prone to obsolescence; for this reason, documentation about their functioning becomes particularly valuable in future reconstructions.

Full-body acting appears in the projects *Sonification of Image 1* (2016) and *Metonymy of Perception* (2007). The former concerns the visualisation of human movement with the help of the Kinect device, which functions as an interface for understanding the relationship between the movement of the robot and the human. The latter is an interactive installation with computer vision, designed according to the model of a conversation with a smart computer, in which the participant articulates the taste of food in relation to the memory of tastes from the past and the situation in which they were perceived, and in contrast to the next taste. The game thus sharpens the participant's perception, memory and ability to articulate. The diegetic act, which develops while playing the four types of game actions, is ultimately participant-oriented and no longer separate from reality.

The last set of discussed projects deals with digital representations of space and digital imaging in relation to the history of fine art, especially painting. The emphasis is on the diegetic acts of the machine, which in digital animations are aimed at understanding the Renaissance perspective. Galloway's coordinates for deciphering the gaming actions of the machine and the participant are shown to be intertwined

and interdependent in the actions of digital painting, which builds an understanding of the impressionistic mixing of colour points and the demarcation of the pictorial surface with Rothko's colour planes. Dragan's characteristic approach also comes to the forefront of these projects. It involves the participant in the action through the artwork, and through this experience, the participant reflects on his own place in the relationship between digital technologies and culture.

The examples in the article show how Galloway's system of gaming actions can be applied to the analysis of new media art as a tool for describing and studying new media art projects. Such a tool is ultimately useful for the sustainable preservation, as this kind of analytical approach can be the basis for future reconstructions or reinterpretations of individual actions from the original project in its new implementations.

(The author acknowledges financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency for the research project Sustainable Digital Preservation of the Slovenian New Media Art, J7-3158.)