Aesthetic uses of the past and limits in the reconstruction of historical spaces inside a videogame

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ABSTRACT: Along the last years we have assisted to the release of a great number of videogames set in the past as, for example, Assassin's Creed: Origins (Ubisoft, 2017). This game offered the player the possibility to tour the city of Alexandria during the first century before Christ. My intention in this text is to develop the use of the past in the reconstruction of urban digital spaces through three video-game sagas, *BioShock* (Irrational Games y 2K Marin, 2007 – 2013), *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog, 2006 – 2017) and *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007 – 2017). Each one of them will serve us to develop and examine the aesthetic uses of the past in the reconstruction of urban digital spaces through the proposed concepts: design, consumption and production. Irrational Games' saga will help us to understand the first concept, the Naughty Dog one the second and the Ubisoft one the third. After these three sections we will elaborate a final section where we will build the video-game as a mass culture medium with other media of same scope and shared features.

KEYWORDS: History; Public use; Mass medium; Video games; Space; City.

RESUMEN: *Usos estéticos del pasado y límites en la reconstrucción de espacios históricos dentro del videojuego.-* Durante los últimos años hemos asistido al lanzamiento de un gran número de videojuegos ambientados en el pasado como, por ejemplo, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017). Este juego ofrece al jugador la posibilidad de pasear por la ciudad de Alejandría durante el primer siglo antes de Cristo. Mi intención con este texto es desarrollar el uso del pasado en la reconstrucción de espacios digitales urbanos a través de tres sagas, *BioShock* (Irrational Games y 2K Marin, 2007 – 2013), *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog, 2006 – 2017) and *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007 – 2017). Cada una nos servirá para examinar tres claves, diseño, consumo y producción. La saga de Irrational Games nos ayudará a entender la primera clave, la licencia de Naughty Dog la segunda y la desarrollada por Ubisoft la tercera. Después de estas tres secciones, elaboraremos una sección final donde examinaremos el videojuego como un medio de cultura de masas en relación con otros medios del mismo alcance y características compartidas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Historia; Usos públicos; Medios de masas; Videojuegos; Espacio; Ciudad.

INTRODUCTION

Along the last years we have assisted to the release of a great number of videogames set in the past as, for example, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017). This game offered the player the possibility to tour the city of Alexandria during the first century before Christ. This saga has specialized in enabling the player to travel through digital reconstructions of cities like Acre and Jerusalem during the XII century, Rome and Florence during the XV century, Istanbul in the XVI century, Boston and New York during the United States' independence, France at the middle of the French revolution or the Victorian London.

This license has not been the only one in the video-ludic scene that had placed the player in contact with historical scenarios. Titles like *BioShock* (Irrational Games, 2007) have already immerse the community of players in highly-detailed cities and others, like the *Uncharted* saga (Naughty Dog, 2007-2017), have offered the possibility of entering in archaeological spaces during missions that involve retrieving ancient relics.

All these reconstructions are not faithful to the past. Some, like Rapture in *BioShock*, presents fantastic elements inside a detailed historical context born in the science-fiction. Some others, like the ones travelled by Nathan Drake, the protagonist of *Uncharted*, are meaningless by themselves and share a fantastic and mythic origin. Last, the ones in *Assassins Creed* pay more attention and detail to the elements that are appreciated nowadays than to the ones that were important in the time that is being represented. They all share a series of shortcomings like the unconcern or the oblivion of the reconstruction of infrastructures, the inexistence of *hinterland* in the first parts or the perfect stylistic homogenization of all the buildings in the city, just to notice some of the more remarkable problems.

This situation leads us to a question: Should the digital reconstructions of cities in the historical games be faithful to the documented past? Video-games' medium present a series of norms that settle its essence, limit and determine the content of what is represented in that medium. Therefore, the content of a videogame must adapt to its' medium own limits and potentials. In this case we talk about three types of limitations: design, consumption and production. Apart from this conditions, which are intrinsic to the video-game, there exist some others that are extrinsic and are shared with other media like film and television: The ends of the mass culture and its' own characteristics. The objective of a commercial videogame[1] is to attract the biggest number of consumers possible. This objective, like any of a mass culture production, is far away from the didactic or critic that is often associated with the historian. Thus, a faithful reconstruction and always attached to a documented past is a futile objective for the developers' studio. The past is employed with other purposes in these productions and brings a series of different benefits like Lowenthal has already explained in his book *The past is a Foreign Country (1985)*.

Beyond this benefits, the reconstructions of historical spaces in video-games share another series of features like its employment to activate the «resonance chamber» of the player (Chapman, 2016:36) or the consolidation of «retro-places» (Venegas,2018) that can be used to easily identify the space and time travelled, and that have as a consequence an homogenization of the past perception in the popular culture, making vane, light and aesthetic the History until making it a commercial product of masses and the postponement of historian's labour.

My intention in this text is to develop the use of the past in the reconstruction of urban digital spaces through three video-game sagas, *BioShock* (Irrational Games y 2K Marin, 2007 – 2013), *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog, 2006 – 2017) and *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007 – 2017). Each one of them will serve us to develop and examine the aesthetic uses of the past in the reconstruction of urban digital spaces through the proposed concepts: design, consumption and production. Irrational Games' saga will help us to understand the first concept, the Naughty Dog one the second and the Ubisoft one the third. After these three sections we will elaborate a final section where we will build the video-game as a mass culture medium with other media of same scope and shared features.

THE PAST AT THE SERVICE OF AESTHETICS. RAPTURE AND COLUMBIA IN *BIOSHOCK* AND *BIOSHOCK INFINITE*

The saga of Irrational Games and 2K Marin began in 2007 with the release of their first title: *BioShock*. This videogame is interesting because it sets the city as protagonist and main theatre of the game's plot. The game, created by Kevin Levine is part of a previous tradition that starts in 1992 with *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* (Blue Sky Production, 1992) and continues with *System Shock* (Looking Glass Technologies, 1994), *Thief: The Dark Project* (Looking Glass Studios, 1998) and *System Shock 2* (Irrational Games y Looking Glass Studios, 1999). All these titles share a series of features and away of understanding the representations of spaces in videogames that start from the same place: Looking Glass Studios. None of these games allows the free displacement of the main character. Each one of the cities and inhabited spaces that appear are conditioned and limited by the design proposed for every one of the potentially explorable spaces. This conception of explorable space in a videogame was developed by Dough Church (Byford,2013)[2], responsible of the first *System Shock* and Kevin Levine's mentor. For this designer a closed space was better than big open space because of a simple reason: The first could be far more detailed than the second. This care for a detailed scenario offered the player a more real sensation that served to potentiate the immersion in the gameplay: *It's better to simulate an enclosed environment in more detail rather than a larger environment with less fidelity*[3].

Search for the «authentic» through detailed and hyperrealism of material culture is an extended practice along the video-games set in the past. This hypothesis is based in the idea of historic realism being understood in videogames as the search for past authenticity by the consecu-

tion of a high degree of realness of the material culture. The realer it seems the realer it will be. According to historian Jerome de Groot, this search for realism through the material hyperrealism is due to developers trying to create a title that can be compared with a movie in terms of style and aspect (De Groot, 2009: 134 y 139). But beyond this intention there are others, like the elaboration of an easily identifiable space, using the past an aesthetic resource in a way that is so detailed that could be considered *real* (Venegas, 2018) using specific elements that activate relations with similar cultural products, like Adam Chapman explained in his book *Digital Games as History*:

> Historical resonance is the recognition of the game as in some way sufficiently real (referential) in its relation to the past as it is understood by the player, and therefore relating to their local context and constituting a shared history (with the global, as represented by the game) (Chapman, 2016: 36).

To fulfil this objective, design a game that could be considered real, one mission explicitly told by the responsible for the video-game, Ken Levine (Guillen, 2007) the developers resorted to architectural styles that matched with the narrative and the plot of *BioShock*. It was an *a posteriori* decision. Levine's first idea for setting the action and time of his game was an underground lab, an idea tightly related with his experience with *System Shock 2* and as a player of *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. Later, Levine justified this idea in the *BioShock* narrative:

> I had this notion of an underwater city. From that, I thought if we wanted to make a game that was scary, it has to be believable… so why on earth would there be an underwater city? So I came up with this notion of this Utopia they didn't want anyone to find. From that, I wondered what sort of Utopia it would be, and came up with the character Andrew Ryan and his sort of philosophical background: pseudo-objectivism and extremely capitalistic view on the world. He'd be terrified the New Dealers in the US and the Stalinists in Russia would find his city, so – as he said – it wasn't impossible to build a city at the bottom of the sea – it was impossible to build it anywhere else. (Gillen, 2007).

As a consequence of this design decision, bet for closed spaces for augmenting the detail of the space, the city cannot be totally explored and the experience is limited to only the parts that the studio decided to build. By denying the free circulation of space the city stops having sense because it encloses it's places in different scenarios, making this places in galleries for shooting.

After taking the design decision, create a FPS4 with closed and well delimited spaces, and some other plot decisions, Irrational Games made an effort for integrating the city in it's historical and political context, the 40's and 50's decades of the XX century. Levine choose the *art-deco* style, characteristic of the 20's and 30's, decade when, inside the fictional world of the videogame, Andrew Ryan, founder of the city, had the idea of creating

his own city. Nevertheless, all these interpretations are narrative and contextual. Rapture is meaningless as a city, the technology that gives its life is magical. We could denominate *BioShock* a post-historical game, as it takes place in the past and in the future at the same time. We could not image the life of a citizen of Rapture through exploring the game. The catchment of food, the labors, the transport systems, the leisure, the marketplace, the functions of the government and even the religion are functions that are hidden to the eye of the character-player and that are explained by newspapers and alternative texts inside the gameplay that the player could ignore.

The studio made a great effort for assort the city historically and politically, but neglected the urbanistic context. Rapture has sense inside it's fictional context, but is meaningless by itself. To accomplish this objective they used a strong *marketing* campaign in which they published false documentary features, rounded with the technological appearance of the time titled «*Fact from Myth*»[5], a practice that they developed even more with *BioShock Infinite* (2013), in which they published a series of documentary features about the city titled «*Truth from Legend: Columbia – A Modern-Day Icarus?*»[6]. Other advertising decisions for round the saga with historical plausibility was the music[7]. For this game they recorded versions of songs like *Fortunate Son*, recorded and published by the band Creedence Clearwater Revival in 1969, with the most popular style at the end of XIX century, the *barbershop* music[8,9]. All these practices and decisions of using History create a relation with an esthetical use of the past that can be used to endow digital reconstructions of the urban space with plausibility and authenticity, all of it with the objective of improving the immersion and the experience of the player.

THE PAST AT SERVICE OF THE MARKET. THE CHEST-CITIES OF THE *UNCHARTED* SAGA

The *Uncharted* saga began in 2006 with the release of *Uncharted: A Drake's Fortune* (2006). In this videogames the character-player portrays Nathan Drake, a middle-aged treasure hunter inspired in characters like Indiana Jones and Lara Croft. The series belongs to the action and adventure genre, and in every iteration of the saga the player should find a series of lost and forgotten relics to prevent them to fall in the hands of his enemies. From the second release this relic is always found inside a city. Effectively, in *Uncharted 2: Among thieves* (2009) the relic is inside the mythic city of Shambala, while in *Uncharted 3: Drake's Fortune* (2011) in Iram of the Pillars, in *Uncharted 4: A thief's end (2017)* we could locate the relic in the city of Halebidu. All of them are mythic cities. The first videogame of the saga made reference to El Dorado, even when it changed the legendary city for a golden idol. And all these fictional cities appear in each one of the videogames as spaces that are potentially explorable. We define them as *potentially explorable* because as, as same as in *BioShock*, the cities of *Uncharted* are closed and each one of the places that we visit are closed. Also, the

pas from a place to another is made through cinematic scenes being, definitely, big sceneries for the player.

The cities of *Uncharted* part from an historical origin and in every one is inhabited or have been inhabited by human or non-human beings. The historical conception of the construction of these cities is full of a dangerous presentism. That is to say, the past only gains importance and sense when it interacts with the present and the actions and decisions of the player. All the buildings, streets and places in the cities are disposed to allow the protagonist to found the necessary clues for accessing the next levels. The traps that difficult this increase of level are made by past towns thinking in the present, in the moment when the city will be abandoned and will become a chest. Three entire cities, Shambala, Iram of the Pillars and Libertatia are lift in hidden places and apart from any type of human presence. To access them is necessary to follow clues, dodge traps and answer puzzles. They are meaningless for the present of who made them. They are meaningless cities. They only make sense inside the narrative and the present of the ludofictional world of the game. The cities are the chest of a hidden treasure. There is no infrastructure. They are so bound to the present that, once the player has abandon them, they will be swallowed by the earth or the sea.

This fact triggers a sensation of appropriation of the past to be used in the present. The History in banalized and turn into an esthetical resource. It is reinterpreted and architectural styles and engineering solutions are invented to serve the player. In the *Uncharted* case it is evident the over-representation of mechanisms and gears. We can find it from Iram of the Pillars, a city that is dated, according to the game, to the first millennium before Christ and is placed in the middle of the Arabic peninsula until a supposed El dorado, through Tibet and Madagascar. In all these places, the form of accessing their secrets will be by solving different logical puzzles activated by different gears that, at the same time, move doors, walls and entire buildings leaving exposed secret entrances: a technology that is very far away from the historical time that is represented.

All of it leads us to conclude that the historical cities represented in *Uncharted*, follow a very extended model in the scene of video-games, and are esthetical sceneries that use the past as a narrative and aesthetic resource. There are much other games that use this scheme: the Tomb Raider saga (Core Design *et al,* 1996-2015), or the video-games that are starred by Indiana Jones (Atari Games *et al,* 1982-2011) are good examples. In all of them the city is a chest that guards a secret and, even when it could seem uninhabited, its own urbanistic setting makes it uninhabitable. They don't have value by itself. The value is a contribution made by the character-player when he or she visits them. The cities live around the player because, as the cities in *Assassin's Creed* that we'll see forward, are made *for* the player.

This approach, the reduction of great historical cities to treasure chests and the figure of Nathan Drake as an archaeologist or at least as the owner of certain interest for the preservation and diffusion of the archaeological heritage, turns the *Uncharted* saga in a danger for the archaeological heritage. These videogames are a true risk at attempting against all the basic principles of the archaeological discipline that, in all these representations, their characters claim to personify and exercise, fact that also is multiplied when we observe the range of audience and public of any of these manifestations.

This perception not only has a profound impact in the individual image of the archaeologist or the historian; it's repercussion goes far beyond. There exist a clear relation between popular opinion and state politics (Tejerizo García, 2008). The denying of the archaeological work in this pieces of massive audience is an attack against the social and scientific status of the archaeologist and goes against the own social and scientific status of the whole discipline (Tejerizo García, 2011). This overthrow of the real function of the men and women occupied in recovering the past provokes a decline in the quality of the state politics applied to them and they are decline in the quality of their work due to lack of the necessary resources.

In all the *Uncharted* saga the fundamental function of Nathan Drake is to search and find until he arrives to the lost city. To look and find is the principal activity of the archaeologist, this explorer dress as an archaeologist as it is our case, in the cultural representations of the labour. Off course, they look and find objects in a perfect state of conservation, relevant and precious by themselves, one of the most notable features of the archaeologist in the popular culture.

> El hecho de que las cerámicas recuperadas por Littman estuvieran enteras refuerza el hecho de que la Arqueología no sólo busca objetos, sino que éstos tienen que ser objetos «bonitos». En la Arqueología diaria, encontrar una cerámica completa es algo muy poco común. Normalmente los restos, estructuras o materiales excavados se encuentran de forma muy parcial, fragmentados o, incluso, ausentes (como ocurre con las estructuras construidas sobre postes); sin embargo, el espectador de cine recibe la imagen de unos arqueólogos que encuentran nada más ni nada menos que el santo Grial (*Indiana Jones y la última cruzada*) o la tumba intacta del emperador Qin con todos los soldados de terracota en ella (*La Momia 3: la tumba del emperador dragón*). La consecuencia es que, cuando éstos llegan a la Arqueología real, se decepcionan por los resultados reales. (Tejerizo García, 2011)

This affair leads us to a very important other. If we have established that these representations affect the image of the labour and the discipline of the archaeologist and that this image influences in the quality and quantity of the politics and helps for this labor, we could add a new one to this two conclusions. In the popular imaginary, deposits with there are found objects that are considered 'beautiful' will have a better place, specially for the worse of the 'common' ones. Therefore, these representations of the past value the object by themselves, they mine the social status of the archaeologist or the historian and the disciplines that are related to the study of the past, and they value more some deposits over some others because of the spectacularism of their findings and not see-

ing the potential information and knowledge about our past that they can hold.

Another of the main problems is the deformation of the own work of the professional. In the *Uncharted* saga, history materializes right in front of our eyes. El Dorado appears before the player and we can even tour inside Shambala or Iram of the Pillars. History comes alive and is in front of us: History becomes present. The work of the historian becomes irrelevant. For this, for facing the historical knowledge there is no need for an historian: There is need for a hero, a Nathan Drake. The action of these 'professionals of the past' doesn't have any relation with the real function of the historian or the archaeologist, it deforms it completely and, the most important of all, obviates all the work previous to the great discovery. Inside the *Uncharted* video-game saga, it is until the last part, *Uncharted 4*, that the player can watch the main protagonist, Nathan Drake, taking notes that are not related with the historical environments that he has visited in the game. During the first three titles he will not have a saying about the remains that surround the city because he doesn't care about the context, he cares about the object. The living proof of this fact is the context of El Dorado; a city and even a reign made completely of gold, are reduced to a simple statue made of solid gold. Or Shambala, where they not look for the mythical city but for the Cintamani stone that lies inside of it. Or in Iram of the Pillars, where they look for an hallucinogen; or even in the fourth part in which, after finding the extraordinary colony of Libertatia, they persist in their search until finding the treasure of the pirate Henry Avery.

The big cities or contexts are not enough for the explorer: The only one element that one should find is the *object*, which is valuable by itself, commercial and functional (it has relation with some esoteric function). History, for all the character in *Uncharted*, is only a commodity.

THE PAST AT THE SERVICE OF *GAMEPLAY*. THE CITIES OF A*SSASSIN'S CREED*

The first release of the *Assassin's Creed* placed the player in the aftermaths of the XII century and allows it to tour the cities of Arce, Damascus an Jerusalem. In Every one of this cities the mission of Altaïr, the character-player, was to end with the lives of some templars to recover his place in the creed of assassins. The plot is an historical fiction where two groups, assassins and templars, have been killing each others through thousands of years. However, the game has been outstanding in a lot of forums because of it's historical 'authenticity' at the evocation of cities. (López Valero y Jerez Martínez, 2015[10], Gilbert, 2016[11] y N. Dow, 2013[12]) and outstanding, among others, the third release of the saga: *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010), that is set in Rome at the end of the XV century.

In the first release, each one of the cities is subdivided in three parts: the poor neighbourhood, the one with middle-class economic power and the one with the powerful. Each one of them is static and is not connected with the rest. Also, the player only can tour inside the 'properly said' city, the pass to the suburbs and outsides is forbidden. Again, we came back to an idea that we have already experimented: the city as a closed and well-delimited scenario made by the studio. The novelty of *Assassin's Creed* is it's intentions for evoking a real city in a period of time. To accomplish this sensation of certain evocation of the past, Ubisoft's team tries to lift, in certain points of the city, some building that the player can easily recognize for example the Dome of The Rock or the al-Aqsa mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the remains of the Temple of Salomon and the Jerusalem citadel. Nevertheless, they forgot some other like the Cathedral of Santiago, or the Tomb of Virgin Mary, for naming some of the more accountable churches of the time. It is also a good example that in *Assassin's Creed II*, the Basilica of the Holy Cross, in Florence, appears decorated as it s in the nowadays, but not as it was in the XV century. (N. Dow, 2013: 217) It is a clear try for relating the building in the videogame with the actual one and to strength the relations of 'authenticity' between reality and simulation during the match.

Comparison of the fronts of the Church of the Holy Cross in Florence before the XIX century, in the XIX century and in the game.

Figure 1. a) Florencia, Iglesia de la Santa Cruz, fachada antigua (fotografía de Gaetano Baccani, 1847); b) Florencia, Iglesia de la Santa Cruz, nueva fachada en estilo neogótico añadida en el siglo XIX (Wikimedia Commons); c) Captura de pantalla del videojuego *Assassin's Creed II* donde podemos apreciar la Basílica de la Santa Cruz con la fachada actual en el siglo XV.

However, due to the game's own form, the city is restricted to a *amusement park* where everything is placed for the player. Jumping and climbing, being one of the main mechanics, a lot of houses and buildings are disposed so the player can ascend easily to the roofs and walk above them. In fact, some of the historical buildings are inside this category because they are considered by the game as architectonical milestones and their discovery and later rise to it's top is rewarded with a part of the city map and a trophy. The city, in *Assassin's Creed* is a decoration where the protagonist should play it's part. Everything around him is build and lift for his joy. Despite all these, we could not stop admiring the work they have done in terms of representation and evocation of the most widely known buildings of the time in every title of the saga.

In the already alluded *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, this scheme of closed and static places is changed for an open scenario where the player can travel the city from the beginning. However, it still have the division of the city in different parts as consequence of the technological potential of the platforms where the game was executed for the first time. Even when in the general map this areas are joined together, the player must wait to the load of each one of the scenarios. The most representative buildings nowadays are the ones that are used to create the image of the 'Rome in the Renaissance''. For example, one of the central places of the city, the Roman Forum where, near to it, are found places like the Coliseum, or the Palatine Hill. In spite of that, some buildings that truly were in that same place during the finals of XV century but that have disappeared nowadays are not present, for example all which was demolished by Mussolini to build the Via dei Fori Imperiali. This decision of the fascist dictator ended with the life of a highly populated zones, the one adjacent to the Col-

iseum and next to the forums. *Assassin's Creed* shows us the roman forum clear of houses, as it is seen nowadays but not in the XV century. The Church of Santa Maria della Pietà al Colosseo, built in 1519[13], and nowadays disappeared is not represented, and neither are some big extensions of building next to the Coliseum. An opposite case also happens, with the representation of invented buildings in places where they not existed just to enhance the roman *retroplace* in the player's imaginary, as the easily recognizable aqueducts.

As a support to the *gameplay*, the Coliseum is just a place of interest to build and enjoy the views and the secondary rewards that came with rising to it's top. *Assassin's Creed* tries to evoke The Borgia's Rome according to a popular culture and to the image of the actual Italian city and not working with the actual historical and documented data and actually trying to lift a city that really evokes the Rome of the final of the XV century. Actually, this idea of historical unreality is even higher when we walk through the city and we see the style of the buildings. If Rome was actually represented as it really was at the end of XV century, probably the player won't recognize it and the game could lost this sense of evocation that tries to give to the player. These anachronisms have that function, bringing familiarity. An evocation that not only rises from urbanism, that is to say from the scenario but from the screenplay too, placing known characters of the time as protagonists of the plot, like César Borgia. Definitely, the city that *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* show us, or any of the posterior releases of the saga, is a vision of the studio which is conditioned by it's objectives: create a product capable of entertaining. The 'authenticity' of the city, acts by doing *marketing* and appeals to the player's feelings: *experiment and tour the Rome of the XV century*. A Rome of the XV century that has more parallelisms with the actual Rome.

Figura 2. Screenshot of Assassin's Creed Brotherhood where we can appreciate
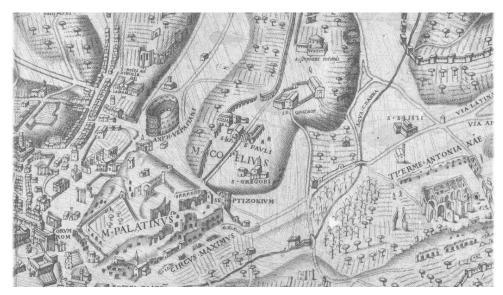Anfiteatro Flavio (Coliseum) and it's surroundings.

FIGURE 3. Image of XVI century Rome. Leonardo Bufalini, 1551[14].

THE PAST AT SERVICE OF THE POPULAR CULTURE

David Lowenthal, in his book *The past is a Foreign Country* (1985), defended that the novelists employed the past as an scenario where they placed his characters (López Valero y Jerez Martínez, 2015:367) and where to develop each one of their plots. The videogame designers do the same use but with some differences. The past in video-games is not only conditioned by the use of specific characters or topics, but also by the chosen main mechanics, the camera's perspective inside the gameplay and the own technical and technological conditions of the systems where the games are being developed and executed. To all these conditions and limitations we have to add another one of equal importance, one that is shared with film and television: The use of image as a form of hegemonic transmission of information.

Each one of these decisions constrain the past that is contain in the digital pieces. The voluntary deformation of memory so it can be turn into a videogame implies a conscient selection of moments and elements that have to reach two objectives: First, to represent the chosen time, a topic that we have already developed using *Assassins Creed: Origins* as an example and second, to choose moments and elements which presence results attractive in a motion image. To make another example, in most of the videogames that are set in the World War II we will see the Battle of Normandy, and inside this operation there will be a main focus in the acts that happened in the beach of Omaha, deleting other less conflictive points of the battle, as well as all the months of preparation and organization of the strategy that finally took place. This decision have two minor objectives: To activate the 'chamber of resonance' of the player to make it conjugate different cultural products that represent the same moment in it's imagination, and to take advantage of the previous cultural representations to show better images, more real or more authentic than the previous ones.

All the purposes that were given in the paragraph above are present in the three examples that were presented in this text. From any instance, at the *BioShock* game, the player must sort a great number of violent conflicts through weapons and it will be the city who will equip the character with more weapons, ammunition, and resources to develop successfully it's violent tasks. The action is above the exploration. The moment chosen for visiting the pseudo-historic city is crucial: A civil war. The player will know the state of the city in an stable moment through different audio recordings and written journals which reading and listening are completely optional. In *Uncharted* happens exactly the same. The cities are galleries for shootings and fights. The archaeological places that the player will visit will be easily recognizable as they hold a tight stylistic and conceptual relationship some others that have already been seen in films, television, and even some other videogames.

Al these objectives are away from the work of the historian and are more like the office of a publisher. They try to sell the past appealing to a technical superiority that have never been seen before and aiming to resurrect the most emblematic moments of the past in the most spectacular way. Is a past made to fit the image, that has to be contained in a photogram and, given that the space has to be finite, it also have to have limits. History that appears in popular culture, in films, television or videogames is fragmented, light and in most of the times it is bane and trivial, common and unsubstantial. The cities and the urban and rural nuclei that appear in this pieces share the same characteristics as they are being transmitted to the player through images, exclusively. According to the already classic piece of Giovani Sartori, *Homo Videns. Televisione e post-pensiero* (1997), "*algunas palabras abstractas (...) son en cierto modo traducibles en imágenes, pero se trata*

siempre de traducciones que son sólo un sucedáneo infiel y empobrecido del concepto que intentan «visibilizar» (Sartori, 1997: 50). The Word *city* could be translated to *image*. We could travel through cities in videogames like *BioShock, Uncharted* o *Assassin's Creed,* but these are always unfaithful and poor compared with the idea of city. Sartori concludes that "*la televisión*[15] *produce imágenes y anula conceptos, y de este modo atrofia nuestra capacidad de abstracción y con ella toda nuestra capacidad de entender"* (Sartori, 1997: 51), that the television destroys our capacity of abstraction and all our understanding. If we base all our understanding and knowledge about the image of archaeologist and the labour of the archaeology in cinematographic or video-ludic fiction-characters like Indiana jones, Lara Croft or Nathan Drake, it will be impossible for us to understand the complete labour of the professionals of the cultural heritage of the past. This fact is verifiable through studies like the one published in the United Kingdom (Russell 2002: 53)[16] during the year of 2002 ant that points out that the 98% of the British limited their contact with archaeology to cinema (Hall, 2004)[17].

Probably this contact has extended to video-games during the last few decades as it is indicated by the very high sells of the game we studied[18].

CONCLUSION

The reconstruction of historical cities in commercial video-games, as we have intended to demonstrate in this article, are characterized for being fragmented, light and unsubstantial. This characteristics are due to it's condition of video-game and way of cultural expression based in image, which vocation is commercial. The condition of video-game constrains the reconstruction through the selection of characters, topics and chosen mechanics, the player's perspective nd the technological capacity of the system where it is developed and executed. The condition of image limits the reconstruction of historical cities to others that the player has already seen and to moments that result attractive to the image in motion. All of it holds a series of consequences like the banalization of the past, and its turn into a commercial product, the relegation and deformation of the labour of the archaeologist and the historian and the impossibility of generating abstract and complete speeches about History in videogames, being substituted by others concrete and incomplete.

In despite of this series of conclusions, videogames hold an immense potential for reconstructing historical spaces in the digital culture. The new release of the *Assassin's Creed* saga, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017) and it's game mode: *Discovery Tour* has deleted the action component of the match and has centered itself in presenting the historic space with a didactic purpose. In it's elaboration have participated numerous professionals of the past that have demonstrated the capacity of participating between the two labors, the video game developer, the historian an the archaeologist. This decision and it's later sell success have demonstrated that the collaboration brings benefits to everyone of us, who work looking to the past.

NOTES

1 With *commercial videogame* we want to point to a videogame that is understood as a product of masses that looks to reach a big audience, aiming to harvest the biggest monetary collection possible.

2 Byford, S. (2013). «*Bioshock Infinite* creative director Ken Levine talks about how to build a world». *The Verge.* Consulted December 31 of 2017 from «https://www.theverge.com/2013/3/27/4151940/bioshock-infinite-ken-levine-interview-with-tom-bissell».

3 Killen, G. (2007). «Exclusive: Ken Levine on the making of *Bioshock***».** Rock Paper Shotgun. Consulted December 31 of 2017 from «https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2007/08/20/exclusive-ken-levine-on-the-making-of-bioshock/».

4 *First Person Shooter.* Subgenre between the *shooter* genre where the perspective in which we play is from the point of view of the character we control. Normally, we only see the weapon or arm of the character.

5 Consulted december 31, 2017 from «https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsJDrsKNYxI».

6 Consulted december 31, 2017 from «https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw3dGl7cBYo».

7 About this, see Jiménez Alcázar, Juan Fco. y Rodríguez, Gerardo. «Medieval Soundspace in the New Digital Leisure Time Media», *Imago Temporis*, 9 (2015), pp. 305-323.

8 Consulted december 31, 2017 from Consultado el 31 de diciembre desde «https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsQuTCycrwI».

9 Barbershop is an style of harmony,*a capella*, characteristic of vocal music that is not accompanied that is noted for it's consonance of chords in four parts for each note of the melody in a texture, predominantly homophonic. The first recording of the style are from 1882 in New York. (Abbott, Lynn, 1992)

10 López Valero, A. y Jerez Martínez, I. (2015). «Textualidad digital y multialfabetización. Los contenidos digitales como material educativo». *Educatio Siglo XXI*, Vol. 33 nº 2 · 2015, pp. 165-182.

11 Gilbert, L. (2016). «The Past is Your Playground: The Challenges and Possibilities of Assassin's Creed Syndicate for Social Education». *Theory & Research in Social Education.*

12 Dow, D. N. (2013). «Historical veneers anachronism, simulation, and art history in Assassin's Creed II». En Kapell, M. W., y Elliott, A. B. (Eds.). (2013). *Playing with the past: Digital games and the simulation of history*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

13 Hager, Hellmut (1973). «Carlo Fontana's Project for a Church in Honour of the 'Ecclesia Triumphans' in the Colosseum, Rome». *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* Vol. 36 (1973), pp. 319-337

14 Masetti, Carla (2010). «La imagen cartográfica de Roma entre fines del cuatrocientos y la primera mitad del quinientos». *Revista de Estudios Colombinos.* Junio de 2010 (nº 6), pp. 31-42.

15 And any kind of cultural transmission channel that is based in images.

16 Russell Miles, 2002b. «No more heroes any more: the dangerous world of the pop culture archaeologist». In Miles Russell (ed.) *Digging Holes in Popular Culture: Archaeology and Science Fiction:* 38–56. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

17 Hall, M. A. (2004). «Romancing the stones: archaeology in popular cinema». *European Journal of Archaeology*, 7(2), 159-176.

18 *Assassin's Creed* franchise had sold , until September 13 of 2016 more than 100 millions of units.. Consulted march 3 of 2018 from «https://www.gamespot.com/articles/assassins-creed-franchise-reaches-100-million-copi/1100-6443544/». The last release, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* has sold, until december 15 of 2017 more than 1.500.000 units, consulted march 3 2018 «http://www.vgchartz.com/article/270771/assassins-creed-origins-sells-an-estimated-151-million-units-first-week-at-retail/». *Uncharted* franchise had sold , until December 11 of 2016 more than 40 millions of units.. Consulted march 3 of 2018 from, «https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2017-12-11-uncharted-series-sales-passes-41-million». And the *BioShock* franchise had sold , until June of 2015 more than 50 millions of units.. Consulted march 3 of 2018 from, «https://venturebeat.com/2015/06/01/bioshock-franchise-sees-lifetime-sales-of-25m-copies-with-11m-from-infinite-alone/».

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