

28

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

The Serious Game of Digitalization

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With the arrival of digitalization, now accompanied by gamification and the existence of virtual reputations, video games have become a sign of progress for some and the precursor of inequalities for others. Aside from these differences, what is unquestionable is the centrality of digitalization in education (e-learning, digital literacy, etc.), work (free work, digital competence) and the economy (start-ups, the sharing economy, block-chains), not to mention the actual media (TDT, new media, transmedia). This is the main scenario in which we propose to discuss a little recognized practice: viral challenges. Far from being something meaningless among typical immature adolescents, “viral challenges” can be understood as serious games, as initiation rituals within the environments and logics of augmented reality. In concrete, we propose to examine them as possible theatricalizations and lessons for a virally enhanced body, which in turn permits us to connect them to certain posthuman theses regarding the importance of the body *per se* (versus the brand or virtual reputation).

Found Imaginaries

For much of the media at the end of the 1990s, video games were synonymous with deviancy, or even crime and pathology. These prejudices were fed by sensationalism in the media. This was the case in Spain of the well-known “Katana killer”, a 16 year old who killed his parents and sister in April 2000, using a Japanese sword or “katana” in the act. According to newspapers at the time, the teen killer was an assiduous player of role-playing and violent video games. Other explanations given to understand this crime that shook Spanish society were martial arts, esoteric tendencies connected to Satanism, the occult

the augmented. To do this requires prior initiation and adaptation to these spaces through play, which makes the confusion associated with new ways of perceiving and perceiving ourselves in these augmented realities more bearable. In this sense, viral challenges, with youth again as transmission belts, as socializing vehicles for new orders and forms of governing and regulation, permit us to familiarize ourselves with new environments of augmented realities and social recognition, in addition to beginning to explore new limits of the body, its possible adaptations and transfigurations to these spaces and the figurative rules that accompany them.

Acknowledgments

To my students in the Anthropological and Sociological Basis of Behavior course (Psychology degree program) and the Sociological Analysis of Texts and Discourses course (Sociology degree program), particularly Miguel Durán, with whom I worked and shared concerns and observations about social challenges during the 2018–2019 academic year. My thanks to Sara Jorquera for reading this text and providing sense, as always, and to Paz Sastre, to whom I am indebted for her many and apt suggestions. And to the editors of this volume, friends and vital intellectual references – thanks.

About the Author

Ángel Gordo López: I am the editor of *Teknokultura* and member of Cibersomosaguas Research Group and of the Discourse Unit. Father of Zadu, 9 years old, and Atis, 2 years old. I am interested in the relations between social change and technology with a specific interest in youth and digital media, in particular in the new forms of socialization under the aegis of digitalization. The more I dive into technology stuff the more interests I develop for alternative ways of food production and consumption, and sustainability issues in general. In this sense I am suspicious of some cyborg images and epistemologies, mostly when they come from the wealthy ultraliberal parts of the planet. I believe that these images and epistemologies need to be grounded in everyday settings and practices beyond any sort of emerging transhuman narcissism or self-referential post-evolutionary logics.

Aside from my worries and “in/tolerances”, my kids (and children and youth in general) are helping me to understand digitalization’s mundane “lived” side, while updating and challenging what I take for granted. That’s the reason my contribution to this collection analyzes viral challenges, something apparently mundane, not very chic or techie. However, unlike other kinds of games, such as alternatives reality games, social challenges are part of an ongoing, often veiled, redefinition of social relations and socialization. We are already witnessing the time when the notion of game, in developmental and social senses, has been replaced and resignified by the very ideologically loaded notion of “viral/social challenge”. Let’s play and see.