

Fragmentation: between expansion packs and episodic video games

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary video game market is more and more crowded with titles that are expanded by digital contents that can be downloaded for free or payment: from annexing additional costumes to the characters, to implementing large portions of narrative, today expansion packs represent a phenomenon potentially and concretely capable of redefining the lifespan of each video game initially sold as a standalone creation, to then prove to be partial when new contents are released. This essay will try to group the variety of these digital contents into two essential sets, and then it will try to understand if the video games expanded by future downloadable contents can be included among the canons of serial gaming, now explicitly represented by the advent of episodic video games.

Keywords

Seriality, DLC, digital distribution.

INTRODUCTION

For home gaming, the early 2000s were a time of strong affirmation of the online sector. No longer the exclusive privilege of the lucky few users to have a suitable PC for playing with a broadband connection, as happened in the 1990s, all owners of consoles placed on the market at the start of the new millennium could easily connect online. These consoles, such as Microsoft's Xbox and Sony's PlayStation 2, amplified the horizons of video game entertainment, not only due to the possibility of facing players at a distance using the same platform, but also thanks to the appearance of new digital commercial stores that created an alternative way to produce/purchase certain video games. As Jaakko Stenros and Olli Sotamaa have argued, the online revolution has caused a shift in the video game industry from the paradigm of products to the paradigm of services (2009). In fact, the online infrastructure has been important for the home gaming for the last two decades, because it has established a variety of services in order to support and extend the potential longevity of some video games through official contents created by the developers.

One of these services is Xbox Live, launched by Microsoft in November 2002 to be initially implemented on the Xbox, and then transferred with many implementations on all future consoles of the American company that came onto the market in the following years, namely the Xbox 360 and Xbox One, with more and more registered users of the service, up to the current 53 million (Redmond 2017). Another similar service is that of Sony, the PlayStation Network, launched by the Japanese company a few years later, in 2006, which has registered 70 million monthly active users, as announced in the last

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Corporate Meeting (Sony Corporation 2017). Steam is currently the online reference platform for PC users: owned by Valve and opened in 2003, it would reach the immense number of 125 million registered users in 2013 (Saed 2015). A common feature of these services, in addition to the function of supporting the creation of online communities thanks to special friend lists to which players may add other users from every part of the world, is precisely the presence of digital stores that represent a parallel and innovative way to achieve the commercialization of video games in physical stores that was typical in the late 20th century.

Users of Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, Steam can purchase a video game in the online catalogues and, after payment by credit card, can receive the chosen video game digitally, with the possibility of downloading it without any time limit. These new commercial perspectives are a parallel to traditional sales through physical markets, and open up new scenarios for video game entertainment. The focus of this essay is the advent of downloadable content (from now on abbreviated to DLC), namely elements that add new features to certain video games previously released on physical and/or digital markets, in such a way as to potentially lengthen their lifespan. At the same time, these online markets have encouraged the steady development of episodic video games: like other serial creations, they are divided into fragments and then released online at varying intervals of time. In the first instance, the purpose of this essay will be to identify two categories which sum up the great potential variety of DLC, and then to demonstrate that the video games initially sold as a unit but then expanded through DLC can be considered episodic creations, even though the critics tend to differentiate expansion packs from serial video games, today based on the development, distribution and explicit usage models made famous with the appearance, among others, of companies like Telltale Games, founded in San Rafael in 2004¹.

DLC: EXTENSIVE AND SUPPLEMENTARY

Although not entirely exclusive to the spread of Xbox Live, PlayStation Network or Steam, it is only since the first decade of the twenty-first century that additional contents following on from the release of many video games have become more widespread². This has been favoured by the birth of the aforementioned online services which redefine the processes followed by the developers to design and distribute their video games. DLC can add portions of varying sizes to a video game released on the market months before³: thanks to the ever more consolidated tendency to propose these contents, developers can afford to expand an already available gaming experience through the release of these expansions on the web. Sold at a lower price than the basic video game, they try to encourage fans to continue playing with an existing title. As Maurice Suckling and Marek Walton have recently stated, DLC can be defined as an

additional content that can be downloaded to enhance a games title; DLC often takes the form of new equipment for characters, added gameplay, and new storylines. (2017, 45)

For the developers, the creation of a DLC can represent in most cases an opportunity to support an existing title, avoiding the several years of creation and high development costs that a new project (or a sequel) would generally require⁴. For the users, the release of a DLC can represent an opportunity to play more with a video game that they have eventually enjoyed before, without spending the full price for a new video game.

DLC can vary a lot from case to case, but in the myriad titles expanded after their initial release present on the market today, it is possible to identify two essential categories, the extensive ones and the supplementary ones.

The first are contents that propose new storylines with the aim of highlighting some important background information stemming from what is known from the basic version of the video games that they expand. Possibly presenting new characters and settings, they are nevertheless generally modelled on the same aesthetic traits as the basic virtual world, which must still maintain their own distinctive aspects. In this case, there may also be additions concerning the various gameplay mechanics and dynamics, which are enriched or at least altered to adapt to new contexts, while remaining firmly anchored to the original video game. This first type of DLC generally aims to deepen some narrative elements of the initial title, given that they propose a considerable expansion of the gaming experience by extending the scope of the narrative happening before, in parallel or after the storyline provided with the basic version.

The case of supplementary DLC, on the other hand, is more limited in that it merely provides an addition, and the goal is to insert some elements that make the tried-and-tested basic version of the video games more varied, without attempting to expand the storyline. Often the supplement provided by this content is automatically present in extensive DLC too, which may feature new ludic elements in order to vary the progression of the expanded storyline.

These two basic categories obviously require different development times, and hence result in different sales prices: an extensive DLC can take several months to develop, and often can cost up to half the price of launching the basic version of the title that it expands; a supplementary DLC, on the other hand, generally requires less time to develop, has a low sales price or can even be used free of charge. However, both types are united by the same objective: to encourage users not to abandon the original video game they refer to, thus increasing its lifespan and delaying the gratification it provides.

This point already allows DLC to be compared to the serial creations: as Francesco Casetti has stated about television series since the 1980s, delayed gratification is a significant feature of a story that is divided into portions and dilated. As he sees it:

the elements are held onto for as long as possible, continually postponing the end, and prohibiting their depletion. (1984, 10)⁵

In the video game field, delayed gratification is also one of the hinges of the medium as illustrated by Steven Johnson in a famous monograph focusing on the positive judgement of media use on the human mind (2006, 25-57). More recently, Luca Papale also upheld the same point of view, stating that achieving generic gratification, whether on a ludic or narrative level, must nevertheless be part of a path that can lead the user to experience subsequent gratification, potentially visible on a metaphorical and at the same time reachable horizon. Papale writes:

the rules that ensure the success of a serial are the same that apply to video games: offer small and intermittent gratifications, with the promise that the greatest and most gratifying satisfactions will be guaranteed in a future that must always seem to be within reach. (2013, 149)⁶

These conclusions can also be applied to DLCs, both expansive and supplementary, since they exist only when a video game, starting from its basic version, explicitly or implicitly reveals the need for new content to make it's ludic and/or narrative substance even more varied in the future. It should be noted that if the supplementary contents concern the addition of new elements referring to the ludic side within a larger video game already defined, thus making it an optional purchase for a passionate user, the extensive contents instead make purchases theoretically unavoidable, since they involve the previously-represented narrative universes, of which they can redefine multiple aspects depending on the individual cases.

Some examples

In the present crowded scenario of video games expanded after their main release, an emblematic example remains *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational Games 2013), the third chapter of the acclaimed saga created by Ken Levine: set in the imaginary Columbia, an apparently heavenly city built above the clouds, this video game puts the user in the role of Booker DeWitt, a man with a mysterious past, who is given the mission, by another enigmatic individual, to go to the floating metropolis to free Elizabeth, a girl with magical powers. The scope of the story immediately takes on a surreal turn, which reveals time travel and alternative realities, until it comes to an open ending. The subsequent extensive DLC is divided into two parts: *Bioshock Infinite: Burial at Sea* (Irrational Games 2013-2014) places the user, and the same gameplay of the original *Bioshock Infinite*, inside the underwater city of Rapture, the backdrop for the first two chapters of the saga. This DLC not only leads users to adapt the skills acquired in the basic version within another context, even encouraging them to take a more cautious approach to the battles in the second part, but expands and clarifies many turning points in the story, completing the circle not only with *Bioshock Infinite*, but with the entire trilogy. Although the main video game therefore offers a “complete” gameplay and story, the deliberate lack of closure to all of the events in the epilogue necessarily supports the presence of an extensive DLC that a passionate user is then stimulated to buy. A few months before *Burial at Sea*, however, Levine's video game was also expanded by a more supplementary DLC, *Bioshock Infinite: Clash in the Clouds* (Irrational Games 2013). This content engaged the players in frenetic battles in six available environments, with the aim of stimulating them to perfect their performance by repeating it several times, so as to obtain a constantly better score, and then compare it with the scores of other users thanks to the possibility of seeing the world rankings for each map in the package.

Thus, this results in a different way of approaching the creation and release of additional contents for the developers: as they are simply additional elements, supplementary DLCs can be produced rapidly after the release of a video game by observing the activities and game modes that the fans of a given title are more apt to carry out, for example as can occur whenever new weapons or multiplayer maps are added. Extensive DLCs, on the other hand, given their emphasis on the storyline, require upstream planning by the developers. Starting from the basic version of a title, the developers have to plan the tightness of some narrative nodes in such a way to be able to dissolve them in the future with one or more extensive DLCs. These have to attract users from those moments of narrative suspension that are needed for the expansions to latch onto, which may not be positioned at the end but also during the progression of the main video game.

Among the countless add-ons, another example could be *Mass Effect* (Bioware 2007) and its first extensive DLC, *Mass Effect: Bring Down the Sky* (Bioware 2008). To sum up very briefly, the first chapter of the saga focuses on the beginning of the epic that leads

commander Shepard and his crew of various alien races to discover an ancient enemy that threatens to exterminate all existing life forms to establish a new order in the galaxy. During his countless trips, Shepard will also meet the Batarians, aliens who show a great repressed anger in the main video game, the reasons for which will only be fully clarified in the extensive DLC released the following year⁷. As stated by the project manager Corey Andruko, *Mass Effect: Bring Down the Sky* took about eight months to develop and was planned in parallel to the main video game⁸.

FRAGMENTATION: BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND EXPANSION

Can video games that are given extensive DLCs at different periods of time after the release of the basic version therefore be considered episodic video games and be placed in the specific category of video game serialization? To answer this question, it is necessary to clarify that episodic video games are based on a principle that I might define as fragmentation and continuity, while video games initially marketed in their own right and then given extensive DLCs are based on a principle of fragmentation and expansion. Before observing these two principles, an important question must quickly be clarified concerning the game time: a useful model for this purpose is the consolidated classification coined by Jesper Juul, which defines “play time” as the clocked time that the player spends in the virtual world, also including any unsuccessful attempts, while it instead defines “event time” as the time of the fictional video game world (2004, 131-142).

For the titles divided into fragments and released on the online commercial services, and therefore the episodic video games with their principle of fragmentation-continuity, there is an explicit serial process based on a subdivision and distribution in parts that tend to be similar in terms of “play time”, in which each episode lasts approximately 120–150 minutes, in order to eventually form a season generally comprising five to six episodes for a total duration of about 12 hours, in line with the average for contemporary video games. The concept of “season” in the video game field is different from that of other contexts, since in this case each episode can be released at variable and irregular time intervals due to the constant work in progress. Indeed, the developers are engaged in monitoring user reactions and feedbacks during the progressive release of episodes, which may lead them to alter the expected future parts.

An example can be seen in the first season of *The Walking Dead: a Telltale Game Series* (Telltale Games 2012)⁹, to be precise in episode 4, when the protagonist Lee and his group find a child who has turned into a zombie in an attic, and the player has to decide whether to kill the child and put an end to his suffering or leave him alone; this scene, as stated in an interview with the creative director and screenwriter of the episode, was decided during the course of work after noticing the intense reactions from the players towards a similar dramatic moment in episode 3, in which the protagonist had a short time to choose the fate of a dying child (Herman and Whitta, 2012). The episodic video games are also based on what Daniela Cardini considers a focal feature of narrative seriality, namely the contemporaneity between the authors’ creation and audience consumption (2004, 25-26). In fact, the development of episodic video games does not allow for the rigid scheduling of the release of each individual fragment from the beginning of a season, because each episode can request different development’s time and it can be released at very variable distances from the previous episode, thus making a single season capable of covering timespans that can last for over a year. Still remaining in the context of video games developed by Telltale Games, the case of *Game of Thrones* (2014-2015) is emblematic in this respect. In this case, after the bimonthly release of each

episode, the sixth and final episode was published four months after the fifth. The term “season”, therefore, is borrowed from other entertainment sectors to identify the structural group containing a certain number of episodes which form a longer story and game span. Since many contemporary episodic video games are based on interactive storytelling where, according to Crawford's words,

the user must be able to make dramatically interesting choices (2003, 262-263),

the saved files are automatically transferred between one episode and the next, to ensure a continuous storyline decided in part by the choices of each individual player, who will assist and take an active part in the story's progression during the various episodes. Episodic video games generally emphasize the user's potential “agency”, a term that Janet H. Murray defines as

the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices. (1997, 126)

Not surprisingly, every episode of the majority of video games developed by Telltale Games opens with the same sentence: “this game series adapts to the choices you make. The story is tailored by how you play” (Figure 1).

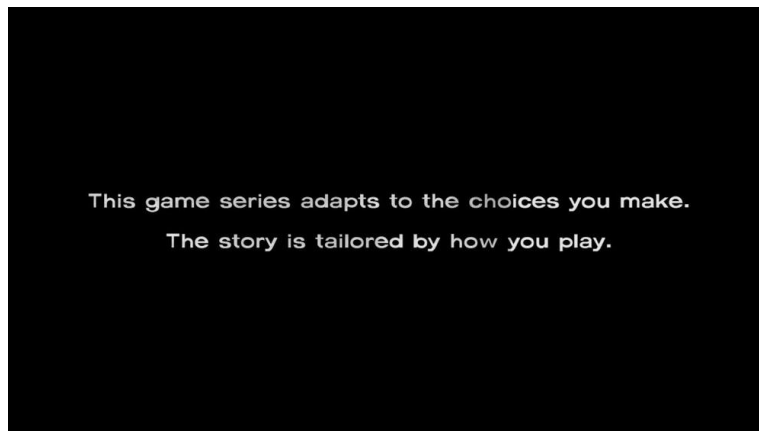


Figure 1: this capture is an example from the beginning of the first episode of *The Walking Dead: a Telltale Game Series*.

Thus, the explicit fragmentation into parts corresponds to a solid continuative narrative link that keeps them firmly united, which each player experiences personally on the basis of his/her choices.

As regards the initially whole titles that are subsequently expanded by one or more DLCs, and thus the principle of fragmentation-expansion, there is an implicit serial process: the average “play time” of the basic video game is initially similar to that of an episodic video game season, that is, around 12 hours. Future DLCs aim to increase this duration, and can retouch some mechanics and consequently game dynamics, as well as amplify and deepen certain narrative aspects in the case of extensive DLCs, which remain contents linked to a title "unitary". The inverted commas are used deliberately because, as

already anticipated, video games of this type need to be designed in such a way as to have moments of narrative suspension or storylines that are just hinted at, which can then be used to support future content, necessarily planned upstream. As a further demonstration of this last factor, it very often happens that when a user is about to buy a video game sold individually with the promise of obtaining extensive (or also supplementary) DLC, the opportunity is given to buy a “Season Pass”, a package that allows the user to download all future content at a reduced price. In this case too, the term “season” returns, and it always refers to the set of ludic and narrative content that a video game contains rather than the period in which the DLC is actually released, which can also be several months after the release of an initial title. Unlike episodic video games, which are linked by a significant continuity emphasized by the automatic function of loading the choices made in the previously saved fragment before beginning the next, in extensive DLCs often there are new storylines that aim to give further depth to what was recounted in the basic version of the video game: on the one hand initially secondary characters may take on a leading role, while on the other hand the initial protagonist may be faced with new challenges hidden in the basic video game.

An example of the first case could be *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar North 2008) and its two successive extensive DLCs, *Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost And Damned* (RockStar North 2009) and *Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony* (RockStar North 2009) which respectively put the player in the role of Johnny Klebitz, the leader of a gang of motorcyclists, and Luis Lopez, a young Afro-American boy who works in a disco. In the initial video game, these characters have very marginal roles, but they provide greater clarity on various events experienced from another point of view to that of Niko Bellic, the tormented criminal protagonist of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. In fact, the three storylines are set in the same macro environment of Liberty City, and there are some points of convergence, as in the recovery of a lot of diamonds, that involves all the three characters in the same place and at the same moment¹⁰.

As regards the second case, an example could be *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Eidos Montréal 2011) and its extensive DLC *Deus Ex: Human Revolution. The Missing Link* (Eidos Montréal 2011), which, as the name suggests, focuses on some hidden events that the protagonist, cybernetic agent Adam Jensen, experiences within the main storyline represented in the basic video game, when moving inside a capsule from Shanghai to Singapore. In *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, to all appearances it seems that the journey has never had any setbacks, but thanks to its extensive DLC it is possible to discover that Adam was actually intercepted, tortured and escaped from unscrupulous soldiers before arriving in Singapore. Often the DLCs do not automatically transfer the previously saved files, to the point that, while on the one hand a good number of them require the basic version of the video game that they expand to be able to actually work, as is the case for *Deus Ex: Human Revolution. The Missing Link*, there is another ever-growing array of extensive DLCs that are sold, from the start or at a later time, as stand-alone video games, that is, able to operate without the need for the main title that they expand, as was the case of the DLCs of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, sold separately in a box set called *Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City* (RockStar North 2009). Alongside the subsequent fragmentation of an apparently whole title, there is, therefore, the beginning of a need for expansion that justifies the arrival of these new contents.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VARIABILITY

Although the principle of continuity is different from that of expansion, it is however important to emphasize that both are based on the more encompassing and unifying

principle of fragmentation, which nevertheless involves the whole medium. As Evan Skolnick points out:

game levels organize ideas and experiences into discrete, contained, and digestible chunks. They are generally designed to stand alone, providing a focused and satisfying unit of entertainment. At the same time, they also link together to form a larger experience. (2014, 140)

In the case of video games expanded through DLC, or those divided into episodes, the experience only becomes totalizing after a certain interval of time separating the release of one fragment from the next, and this time interval emphasizes what Torben Grodal considers the four fundamental characteristics of video game practice: curiosity, surprise, suspense and repetition (2000, 197-214). Episodic video games are explicitly fragmented from the beginning, often presenting interactive storylines that emphasize moments of narrative suspension to stimulate the users' suspense, curiosity and possibly surprise, especially at the end of each episode, when the fragmentation becomes evident and it is necessary to insert a particular event to stimulate the wait for the next episode. In addition, the various narrative ramifications that these video games may take encourage the repetition of every single episode in order to discover every possible route that the story could take on the basis of the choices made. Although initially sold as unit contents, video games expanded by DLC implicitly possess all those elements capable of being extended in the future, and it is no coincidence that they often round off their initial 12 canonical hours of "play time" with open finales, which highlight the need for future expansions. Based on the same aspects related to the video game practice mentioned above by Grodal, they end up explicitly expressing a structure that was only implicitly serial at the beginning. In fact, both in the case of video games with an open ending or even those that display enigmatic aspects as the game and the story progress, there are elements that underline a suspension with the aim of creating suspense, curiosity and possibly surprise in the users in the time gap that separates the release date of the original video game and the subsequent expansions.

This is the common technique of "cliffhanger", which is a core concept in every form of narrative seriality: Suckling and Walton defines this term in the field of video games as

an unresolved, potentially disastrous situation that occurs at the end of a game scene or episode that encourages players to either keep playing or purchase further content in order to discover how matters were resolved. (2017, 251)

These words underline that the technique of cliffhanger concerns traditional video games, due to the delayed gratification, even more postponed when such titles are expanded in the future by DLC tied to the narrative suspensions highlighted in the basic version, and also that the same technique of cliffhanger concerns episodic video games, due to their natural necessity of narrative suspensions that support players curiosity in the time gap between episodes¹¹. The wait between the release of the next DLC or episode can be filled by the user by repeating the main adventure, since, regardless of the presence or absence of an interactive storytelling, as Barry Atkins states,

the pleasure of videogaming stems from the most disparate eventualities, from trespassing. (2005, 182)¹²

To trespass is to try out all the possibilities, and that means repeating already completed sections, because video games have always proposed the fundamental characteristic of narrative seriality, that is, the variability of constancy, which various researchers have investigated in other contexts of entertainment (Casetti 1984; Dall'Asta 2009). Moreover, as Mark JP Wolf states,

a video game experience can vary widely from one playing to another. Even if a player has the right skills, there are often courses of action and areas of the game which are still left unexplored even after the game has been played several times. (2001, 7)

It is precisely on the potential variability of the gameplay and/or storyline that video games expanded by DLC and episodic video games are based both in order to maintain high levels of user interest between one fragment and another, and to increase their total lifespan by extending the final gratifications. The different continuative and expansive articulation on which the same process of serial fragmentation is based, also establishes a distribution process in the physical markets that are common to episodic games and those extended/supplemented through DLC. It may be that, after the release of one or more DLCs, a video game initially marketed as a unit title is sold again after a long time, including in the physical edition the basic version and additional content initially released only online, such as *Grand Theft Auto IV: Complete Edition* (RockStar North 2010). Similarly, the most successful episodic video games, after the complete release of a season, can be published in a physical pack that includes all the episodes initially only available online, as is the case of all the seasons currently making up *The Walking Dead* video game series, recently included in a box set called *The Walking Dead: The Telltale Series. Collection* (Telltale Games 2017).

This process happens for obvious economic reasons, since in this way it is possible for developers to maximize the profits of a title that has already been released, and it gives people who live in places without the broadband Internet connection needed to digitally download big contents the chance to play. Furthermore, this process demonstrates that an episodic video game initially released online, or a video game initially released in physical stores and extended/supplemented through one or more DLCs online, can be sold as a “new” title in physical stores after the complete distribution of one or more seasons that emphasize its serial fragmentation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the answer to the initial question is therefore affirmative: although focused on expansion instead of continuity, video games extended through DLC can be included in the same group dominated by the fragmentation that governs traditional episodic video games. When a video game receives a DLC, especially an extensive one, it becomes clear that the basic version, even if can stand initially alone, it is designed to be part of a larger whole, as happens with every portion of an episodic video game. As a result, on a ludic and narrative level, this emphasizes various elements that are useful in guaranteeing a serialization process after the initial release, based in both cases on the same characteristics of video game practices.

ENDNOTES

¹ In this essay, I am going to take as examples some titles developed by Telltale Games since it has been the main company that has enjoyed commercial and critical success with

episodic video games. However, it is not the only one: another example is the French company of Dontnod, which has obtained a huge acclaim for its title *Life Is Strange* (2015). Nevertheless, it is right to precise that some companies are actually in stuck with their serial projects: an example is *Blues and Bullets* (A Crowd of Monsters 2015-TBA), that has had some difficulties in the development and it has remained stationary after the second episode, released in Spring 2016.

² Since the Eighties, thanks to a service like GameLine for Atari 2600 consoles, it was possible to download entire video games by a phone line connected to a central server. During the Nineties, Internet connections became even more widespread than before, and the video game market adapted to these changes: an example could be represented by *Wing Commander: Secret Ops* (Origin Systems 1998), an episodic video game released weekly and exclusively online, which was at the same time an expansion pack of its predecessor, *Wing Commander IV: Prophecy* (Origin Systems 1997). However, despite of some experiments, it is only from the beginning of 2000s that the online service becomes a steady reality in the video game industry.

³ In some cases, even years before. An emblematic example is *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North 2013), which has been constantly updated by new downloadable contents until today.

⁴ Despite of that, it is important to precise that the development of a DLC can also be parallel and connected to the development of a new project or a sequel. In fact, a DLC can also be a presentation of a forthcoming video game, as it happens for example with *Dead Rising 2. Case Zero* (Blue Castle Games 2010), which is a prologue that has been released three weeks before *Dead Rising 2* (Blue Castle Games 2010).

⁵ (My translation from the original: “gli elementi vengono tenuti il più a lungo possibile, procrastinandone continuamente la fine, esorcizzandone l’esaurimento.”)

⁶ (My translation from the original: “le regole che assicurano la buona riuscita di un serial sono le stesse che valgono per i videogiochi: offrire gratificazioni a piccole dosi e in maniera intermittente, con la promessa che soddisfazioni più grandi e più appaganti saranno garantite in un futuro che dovrà sempre sembrare a portata di mano.”)

⁷ From the first video game, the sci-fi universe of *Mass Effect* has been dilated by a lot of ramifications among several media, and it consists now of four basic video games, approximately sixty DLCs, seven novels, twelve comic books and one animated movie. Even if it would require a separate analysis, it is important to note briefly that this saga is one of the most relevant examples of what Henry Jenkins calls transmedia storytelling, a narrative structure where each medium makes its specific contribution to the unfolding of a story distributed on a variety of entertainment sectors (2006; 2007). From 2007, *Mass Effect* establishes the coordinates of a detailed sci-fi universe, able to build up a narrative ecosystem, that is the orchestration of a long-lasting, persistent and shared world (Bisoni, Innocenti 2013; Pescatore 2018) along the following years, in which a lot of events are clarified not only during the progression of the video game saga with its DLCs, but also through the ramifications on other media.

⁸ From the bonus disc of the Platinum Hits Edition of *Mass Effect*. Video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No0Wmqj3Z90&index=5&list=PL6efm7hzcUWubgExTN-GF7_wlk4-2aqHx (accessed: 10 April 2018).

⁹ This video game is based on the famous franchise of *The Walking Dead* ideated in 2003 by Robert Kirkman with the comic series, which has been adapted and expanded in two television series, six novels, six web series and several video games. In another essay, I have made an analysis of the narrative correlations between these ramifications, with a specific focus on the first Season of the video game developed by Telltale Games (Genovesi 2017).

¹⁰ There is an interesting unofficial video that explains in detail causes and consequences of the diamonds story between *Grand Theft Auto IV* and its two expansions. This 100 minutes long montage involves gameplay sections and cutscenes. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUVL0mCMLac> (accessed: 10 April 2018).

¹¹ The technique of cliffhanger can also concern the correlations between a title and a planned sequel (at least ideally). There are a lot of cases in which a video game has an open final in order to stimulate people's curiosity during the years of waiting for a sequel, as happens for example in the last cut-scene of *Dead Space* (EA Redwood Shores 2008), where a shocking event will be the starting point of *Dead Space 2* (Visceral Games 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to precise that, generally, while the technique of cliffhanger, both in video games expanded by extensive DLC and in episodic video games, serves for tie one portion to another one which is usually in a concrete development phase, the same technique can be considered as a sort of hope for the developers in case of sequels, in order to imagine a new chapter of a saga, which, however, is not yet in development.

¹² (My new translation in English from the first translation in Italian: “il piacere del videogioicare scaturisce proprio dalle più disparate eventualità, dallo sconfinare”).

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