

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

Editorial: Green Computer and Video Games

This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1652562> since 2017-11-22T09:52:38Z

Terms of use:

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)

Editorial

Creative Writing and Art Green Computer and Video Games

Serenella Iovino
University of Turin, Italy
ecozone.arts@gmail.com



Halfway between virtual realms and mineral materiality, the world of computers appears on our ecological horizon by way of paradoxes. On the one hand, as products of industry and objects in a cycle of production and consumption, computers embody the striking contradiction between the planned obsolescence of their forms and the “deep time” of their matter (Zielinski, *The Deep Time*). That is why the Anthropocene is also, and essentially, connected to a “geology of media”: “Media history conflates with earth history; the geological material of metals and chemicals get deterritorialized from their strata and reterritorialized in machines that define our technical media culture,” writes Jussi Parikka (*The Anthropocene*, Kindle pos. 245-246; see also *A Geology*). On the other hand, however, virtual reality, and videogames in particular, might be precious allies of the environmental imagination. Their power to exercise influence in our cognitive and affective sphere is excellently pointed out by John Parham and Alenda Chang in their introduction to the “Green Computer and Video Games” special focus section of *Ecozon@*’s Autumn 2017 issue. Virtual reality, they observe, can “immerse us in environments while narrating ecological interrelationship.” The “linkage between body, environment, and narrative forged in motion pictures” is further intensified by “the interactive nature of playing computer or video games.” Games indeed, notes object-oriented-ontology theorist Ian Bogost, “insert themselves into our lives, weaving within and between our daily practices [...]. They induce feelings and emotions in us, just as art or music or fiction might do. But then, games also extend well beyond the usual payloads of those other media, into frustration, anguish, physical exhaustion, and [...] desperation” (ix).

If so, what is the role of art and creative writing in the discourse of computer and green gaming? To what extent can virtual reality be a substitute for, and even complement our physical creative relationship to the world’s ecologies? And what are the futures conveyed by this virtual “amplification” of reality?

To address these very questions, and with the purpose of opening a conversation with the journal’s scholarly segment dedicated to this topic, the Creative Writing and Arts section offers a thought-provoking selection of works by international artists. Despite their diversity of languages, styles, and genres, these contributions have something in common: they all show how, when considered as works of art, virtual media and gaming reveal an overall amplification of creativity, with very interesting ecological applications. The exploration begins with the cover, which is drawn from the concept art for *Eco*, an educational game developed by the Seattle-based studio Strange Loop Games. As Alenda Chang and John Parham write in their Introduction, *Eco* is a multiplayer “global survival game” capable of stimulating “deep affective opportunities for environmental meditation.” By aligning human impact to the life of ecosystems, this “build-

your-own-world” game is intended to encourage sustainable thinking on the part of individual players, for instance by limiting the hunting take on wild elk. The final goal is that, collectively, both human player-characters and nonhuman species and habitats might survive, and even flourish.¹

From video games to virtual and augmented reality (abbreviated: VR, AR) is but a short step. The opening piece in this section is a suite titled *Gardens of the Anthropocene*, by the world-famous virtual reality artist Tamiko Thiel. A pioneer in the creation of “poetic spaces of memory” for social and cultural issues, Thiel is an art activist in the fields of VR and AR: a founding member of the artist group *Manifest.AR*, she has animated guerrilla AR interventions and uninvited performances in such prestigious sites as New York City’s MoMA and the Venice Biennale. Her *Gardens of the Anthropocene* is a public space Augmented Reality Installation, which was originally commissioned for the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park in 2016, and then disseminated to other sites. As the artist explains in her description, *Gardens of the Anthropocene* “posits a science fiction future in which native aquatic and terrestrial plants have mutated to cope with the increasing unpredictable and erratic climate swings.” The plants featured in the AR installation are all modeled on the native vegetation in and around the Olympic Sculpture Park—vegetation that can thrive with land drought and warming seawaters, and are therefore expected to adapt to the temperatures of a progressively warming climate. Taking its cue from these scientific premises, the installation goes on to imagine a “dystopian scenario” (Thiel’s words) in which plants face a naturalcultural mutation: becoming capable of extracting nutrients from sunlight and soil, as well as from the electromagnetic radiation of mobile devices and artificial structures, vegetal creatures transgress not only the “boundaries between underwater and dry land,” but also those between “reactive flora and active fauna.” And so, in images 1-2 we see “Bullwhip Kelp Feeding on Road Signs,” in 2-3 a “Mutant Farewell to Spring Flowers” (an AR which is further virtualized by the use of smartphones), and in 4-5 an invasion of “Giant Red Algae” that seize both the Pioneer Works Art Center, Brooklyn, NY and the Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

The second art contribution is *Quick Response Journey*, an installation by Pia Alejandra Galvez Lindegaard. Born in Chile but currently based in Spain, Galvez Lindegaard is an environmental artist and architect, whose work consists mainly in site-specific installations and manipulations of low-impact natural materials, such as wood, timber, straw, water, bamboo, and canes. *Quick Response Journey* draws inspiration from the QR code, a two-dimensional code, apt to efficiently store data. As the author explains, a QR code, thanks to its being “dematerialized,” is able to contain a huge amount of information, which can be instantly read by a machine. In Galvez Lindegaard’s eyes, this symbolizes another contradictory reality, namely, that of humans’ faith in technology pitted against the persisting slowness of their experience of the world. The installation’s artistic “journey” is thus conceived as a sort of virtual trip via the QR code, an instant “pilgrimage” back and forth between “our primitive and technological needs.” So the artist: “We start the journey entering from the carbon society. While we walk through the green corridor we absorb all the condensed amount of data of living nature. The same QR code is in the centre inside an illuminated box from the bottom full of sprouts, symbols of nature and inspiration to reverse the destruction of the earth going towards a post-carbon society.”

The next piece is a short story, “Waiting for R2D2,” written by Anthony Lioi. A Professor of English at the Juillard School in New York and a writer, Lioi is also the author of *Nerd Ecology*,

¹ I thank Alenda Chang and John Parham for their insightful comments and explanations about *Eco* in our private correspondence, from which my summarizing lines essentially stem.

one of the most innovative and enjoyable studies in ecocriticism to date. Echoing Beckett, Lioi reflects, as he declares in his statement, “on the possibility of benevolent artificial intelligence using the figure of R2D2 from *Star Wars*.” With the irony and brilliance that also characterize his scholarly prose, Anthony tells us about his personal “bot-topia,” halfway between a New Jersey boyhood and the Galactic Republic. What can we expect from a droid whose mission is to save the day at least once in every episode of George Lucas’s saga? Maybe the promise of a better “future coming from the past”:

A long time ago in a galaxy far away, there lived a band of heroes named after the light of courage. The Green Lanterns. There were as yet no humans, but there was a dude so hot for power, he might have been from Jersey. To save planets from his madness, a Lantern named 3ri11—an artificial intelligence from beyond space, a bit chunky, like in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—it sacrificed its life. [...] Our giant robot friend [...] died, but not without a vision. “FINAL CONCLUSION,” sez 3ri11, “The most efficient way to find the Creator is to protect the Creation.”

The cosmic travel continues in the poetry section, which features two original contributions. The first one, “moonbow o color is a code” by Chilean poet Luis Correa-Diaz, connects more explicitly with the special focus’ topic. Correa-Diaz, who is Professor of Latin American Studies and Digital Humanities at the University of Georgia, is author of *CosmologicalMe*, and *clickable poem@s*, poetry collections suspended between virtual reality and ecology. “moonbow o color is a code” is a meditation on the physical energy of colors and bodily proximity situated at the intersection of languages (English and Spanish), hyper-textuality, and emotions. The quantic texture of light and colors is intertwined with the lover’s corporeal temperature, the vibrations of air that turn into sounds, and the dance of photons and atomic particles. The seamless continuity between the emotional sphere and the digital media world is visible in the Youtube links embedded in the poem’s text, which signify the deep entanglement of our visions, sensations, and feelings with a virtual world that, though seemingly ethereal, reverberates with the material sphere of human affective experience.

The second lyrical contribution, with which our section closes, is “Dos Ecoepoemas Homoerótico y Otras Voces/Two Homoerotic Ecoepoems and Other Voices” by the Costa Rican poet and scholar Ronald Campos López. Only apparently detached from our topic, this poetical suite reveals its lyrical power in the centrality of game and imagination, bodily and virtual encounters. The two homoerotic poems, “Cosmic room” and “Veil your nudity,” are parts of *The Depravity of the Light*, an unpublished collection in which the author addresses the importance of gay voice in Costa Rican poetry. Rooted in a compound cultural heritage which encompasses Hispanic-Muslim, Hispanic-Jewish, Indo-American and Hispanic-Christian mystiques, as well as ecophilosophical perspectives, these poems express intimacy and cosmic interconnectedness, full corporeality and a sense of the sacred. Here the “cosmic room,” writes Campos López, a “supra-reality” in which his two male lovers dwell, is turned, “poem by poem [...] into a space of life, of luminous resistance,” where they fight, symbolically and performatively, against homophobic injury, on the national and global level. The “Otra Voces” sequence, two parts of which are reproduced here, consists of three unpublished poems, in which the author gives a voice to what he calls “cracks”: nonhuman things traditionally considered inert, “for example: the beetle, the Saharan haze or the cedar.”

From extended consciousness to augmented reality, from the dream of droid saviors to the mystique of inclusive forms of loving otherness, this section has beamed up in a world where natureculture is embodied in the form of futurepresent. “*Il futuro non è più quello di una volta,*”

“The future is no longer what it used to be,” someone has written, remindful of Paul Valéry, on a wall in Milan. Still, like Kant’s regulatory ideals, we do need a better memory of the future, if we want to make the present a livable place. With their commitment to an earthly persistence despite and through overwhelmingly increasing realms of virtuality, the visionary works included in this Creative Writing and Arts section are the demonstration that “it is not a memory of the past, but a memory of a better future, an instrument for making that future real” (Lioi 3). Or, with a line from “Waiting for R2D2”: “Millions of us feel the pull of a future from the past. We wait for the better robots of our nature.”

Works Cited

- Bogost, Ian. *How to Talk About Videogames*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Lioi, Anthony. *Nerd Ecology: Defending the Earth with Unpopular Culture*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- . *The Anthroscene*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. Kindle edition.
- Zielinski, Siegfried. *The Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006.

All quotations from the contributors of this art section are available on the journal’s platform.