

First Person Shooter: The Subjective Cyberspace

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The most important thing about the First Person Shooter (FPS) are its genre conventions and the fact of keeping the graphic card hardware industry leaning forward. We may say the FPS is a technology-driven genre, due to hardware demands; however it is also *subjectivity-driven*. Videogames in its short history present a huge list of titles that continue to improve the ludic cyberculture, but the FPS videogames are the ones who improve the entire videogame industry by concealing big maps, advanced AI, complex Trigger Points¹ in the game programming, and, of course, in astonishing audiovisual landscapes. Based upon the legacy of linear perspective from the graphical arts and the computer code languages, the way the FPS is still played has its origins, whether it is in VR systems, LCD screens or LAN-PC-based game parlors. According to the evolution of the computer networks and the online multiplayer parties, the FPS has evolved into an online-venture game. The FPS is the videogame genre responsible for requiring more hardware and software to fit in the performance of Full Motion Videos, Cut-scenes, Rendering Sequences and Machinima.

What makes the First Person Shooter so interesting to watch and so addictive to play is the fact that the player actually sees all the world-environment as if he would be there, “right there, right then”, as a form of “right here, right now”. Seeing all the action under the perspective of a character’s eyes puts the player beyond the task of being a computer user, and a game player, ahead or before the screen frame. Therefore we may call him *user-player*, because before the game rules are established, he is a user of that technology, no matter which game interaction is at stake. Although, the ability to see one’s hands, touch objects (*Half-Life 2*), turn the lights on in dark places (*Doom III*) or actually get into a fight (*Breadown*) seems also to be highly addictive for players.

Some developers try to aestheticize the weapon relationship that gamers maintain with the images of the game guns (obvious in games such as *Black*). Beyond the realm of present day gamers start to find in store’s shelves FPS games that look like *western* movies

(*Gun, Call Of Juarez*), but the questions get complex when we find other videogame genres including the first person perspective to improve immersion in their VR world. It means the FPS conventions are crossing platforms and game styles because they are focused on immersion. And despite FPS games looking awesome in flat screens, in comparison to the VR promises of Head-Mounted Display (HMD) and Datagloves; we did not go into virtual reality through helmets and wires. It just so happened that screens are still addictive, and in the realm of the FPS genre, they actually play a role of utmost relevance, because screens allow to see a sort of *partial reality*, a *sliced reality*, in fact, of a much broader, high-definition, 360° *media-environment*. By being able to spot just part of the action, *user-players* get much more thrill than in playing any other game genre.

Some videogames like *Black* sure underline the concept of “Gun Porn”, because they focus on the phallic form and functionality of the FPS. But in games such as *Red Steel*, *user-players* actually may play in 3D with a Wi-Fi remote controller that understands the movement of the player’s arms in several coordinates axis. The result is a “what you do appear in the game” strategy, as if there would be no screen frame between game and gamer. Other FPS videogames actually are very immersive because Non-Playing Characters (NPCs) show up in great quantity, interact and make us, the lead *user-player*, feel that we are part of a wide scale virtual reality. In this case, the *programming/mise-en-scène* is so sophisticated that *user-players* clearly are users of a new media for audiovisual storytelling in the first place. This so-called *user-player* is so immersed in a technological discourse much before the game logic that it is usual for gamers to actually forget how much time they spend just to be aware of the game’s codes. Besides playing, the multiplayer world of videogames allows *user-players* to discuss strategies and share valuable information through the networks. For that purpose they transcend the boundaries of mere Multi-User Displays (MUDs) born for chat room communication — which is typography — and reveal a new behavior in the digital realm of the First Person Shooter — a *machine-*

subjectivity — because they are always inside a virtual space — which is composed by digital topography. Halfway between the real and the virtual is the screen, a projection place where we identify what it is left of a postmodern representation, our hand (as in *Medal Of Honor*), arms (*Far Cry*), legs (*F.E.A.R.*), but not that often a face (*Doom III*).

We can see our hands in *Breakdown*, talk to NPCs in *Half-Life 2*, contemplate real-action war theatre in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, but not many games immerse us inside paradise landscapes like *Crysis*. Some new approaches in the FPS development, like SEGA's *Mirror's Edge* evokes the first person perspective and redefines the FPS style conventions in urban virtual space to do something besides shooting monsters. Everything is about the person, not the gun: the character we play with is called Faith and it is all about acrobatics. Anyway, it is always understandable that the inexorable sci-fi aesthetics support the FPS genre since its beginning in *Wolfenstein 3D* or in *BattleZone*. William Gibson's *Cyberspace* is the *ur-definition* of the digital ludic topography of nowadays *subjective gamespace*. This *subjective cyberspace*, as I prefer to call it, is much more fast-forward than most of the hardware technology left off by two decades of VR start-ups. Undoubtedly in its own way, the FPS is the VR that never happened global of the screen frame. The *subjective cyberspace* has been built by *user-players* themselves, what led to the creation of *Counter-Strike*, originally a Mod created for the outstanding *Half-Life* First Person Shooter. A *user-player* runs in corridors, deciphers architecture enigmas and experiences something like a movie storytelling, which is the point when a FPS leaves an

unforgettable mark on the gamer. Subject and machine get along through a network of ludicity in which the core is a videogame.

Thanks to contemporary Graphic Engines,² First Person Shooters are becoming more complex in their development, due to the bigger Middleware research teams and graphic artists necessary from concept art till programming. Software engines are being so well designed — in terms of physics, motion, time — that a desirable effect is that FPS videogames will become much more story-based cinematic experiences than before. We may understand also that the ever-expanding topographies of FPS games in online parties are so relevant that it is obvious they will become more and more *vehiculation spaces* or *transit space*. Which is to say, places unreal enough to pass-by but not real enough to stay-in. Playing *Half-Life 2*, *Far Cry*, or *Crysis* allows us to understand better this conception of cyberspace as a place — in a Gibsonian and McLuhanesque manner — that actually is a *media-environment*, but a place so big as the infinite vectorial gamespaces of movies like *Tron*, for which to travel a vehicle is very necessary. The first videogame to justify the vehicle as a tool in space, due to the topography size, was the classic *Tau Ceti*.

Inside the global entertainment arena the First Person Shooter is the only game genre that allows *user-players* to accept the virtualism as an addictive substance. Substance which in this case is built upon textures, sounds and motion capture techniques, all this to introduce us to the most believable *machine-images* (André Parente, 2004) ever made. Images introduce us to weaponry, cities, vehicles, characters and a whole army of digital



Crysis



Mirror's Edge

actors to interact with. The next generation of graphic and ludic images are already here, they're focused on machines and they are machine-like, code bits. And they all are in the same space, like William Gibson confirms about classic arcade videogames: "Well, if there's space behind the screen, and everybody's got these things at some level, maybe only metaphorically, those spaces are all the same *space*" (Mark Neale, 2003: 2.8: Cyberspace). Gibson forecasts the relation between player and cyberspace as a relationship of subjectivity based on space grids. The same is to say that cyberspace

is a *subjective landscape*, all is about how the *user-player* plays by the book of cyberspace rules (*ludus*) or not. Nonetheless, in *The Language of New Media* (2001) Lev Manovich, states that for the first time, space becomes a *media type* (p.251). In other words, cyberspace has become a media format, beyond any corridor of player movement. In the end stands only collections of forbidden images, belonging to copies which are themselves forbidden, and those require subjectivity due to hiding such a grandiose apparatus.

- 1 Trigger-Points are distinctive zones in game maps in which players trigger Cut-Scenes, adversaries showing on or accidents, just by getting across such areas.
- 2 The Graphic Engine is the software used by designers to create virtual architectures that comprehend the simulation of physical phenomena, as well as the recreation of perspective in terms of optics.

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Videografia

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