

Rolling Rhetorics

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ABSTRACT

Ian Bogost, new media philosopher, described *procedural rhetorics* as a way of persuading people through video games. But procedural rhetorics merely imply some behavioral change after a series of cognitive procedures, and therefore procedural rhetorics could be applied in every context in which interactivity and a proper semiotic system would be involved. I will try to find earlier demonstrations of procedural rhetorics in religion, politics, marketing, etc; and I will focus on role-playing games as one of the greatest examples: they allow players to explore a story (concerning rhetorics) with a series of formal and social rules (concerning the procedure) in a way that their past choices will shape their future decisions.

Key words: Ian Bogost, Dungeons&Dragons, Cyberpunk, Paranoia, pedagogic, persuasion, procedural rhetorics (PR), role playing game (RPG), serious gaming, videogames.

Re-understanding RPGs

Some youngster turns off all the lights but two dimmed amber lamps, another one runs the playlist they have been listening to for weeks, and a third one opens a few snack bags. Everyone sits at the table and the host gives them back lots of papers, dice, pencils and threatening glances; he will be the Dungeon Master. The game starts, and those who five minutes ago were cycling from school towards one of them's home, wearing winter coats and student bags become heroes one more time. There are no assignments, nor exams, nor evening trainings anymore; instead, they are facing the dragon again, the beast they left seven days ago when the clock said it was too late to keep on playing.

In *Persuasive Games* Ian Bogost attempts to define how videogames can reshape human behaviour through their inner procedurality, which becomes a full rhetoric system by the act of

playing itself. But the inevitable presence of role playing games¹ since “the creation in 1974 of the game *Dungeons and Dragons*” (Douse, McManus) invites to ask whether Bogost’s procedural rhetorics may have any earlier manifestation and if therefore they are not merely constricted into a digital environment.

As Hughes states, “roleplaying occurs in the collective realm of fantasy [...] As such, collective fantasy stands as a prime example of the symbolic interactionist approach to the construction of meaning, a true universe of discourse”. Both, precedents and similarities, set RPGs as an earlier form of procedural rhetorics, which makes us wonder whether procedural rhetorics might be the concrete definition of a wider phenomenon that has been taking place in many different aspects of human life along human History.

Bogost briefly defined procedural rhetorics as the “practice of using processes persuasively” (3). Such a short and open definition can match with almost every procedure in which the system of meaning changes due to the processes. Anyhow, the author prefers to trace some limits on what should be understood by *procedure* and *rhetoric* in each case.

The idea of *procedure* should not just connote *process*. A process is defined by a series of rules that explain a series of actions in order to achieve a previously defined objective, but it does not necessarily concerns the manipulation of meaning nor includes human interceding as a necessary factor. A procedure should be understood in the sense Janet Murray gives to it in *Hamlet in the Holodeck* when she explains “four essential properties of digital artifacts: procedurality, participation, spatiality and encyclopedic scope” (4). This vision slightly differs from the programming paradigm described as “procedural” (11-12) in which virtual entities are defined after a series of procedures, like when a computer draws something by executing an algorithm that was meant to create it. Indeed, “to write procedurally, one authors (sic) code that enforces rules to generate some kind of representation, rather than authoring the representation itself” (4) but it is also mandatory to append the idea that this inner procedures can depict higher human procedures as the rules or the paths the user is meant to accept. Therefore, procedurality must be understood in many levels, underlining in which terms the human part will interact with the digital one. In other words, *procedurality* points *interactivity* much more than *processability*.

On the other hand, the idea of *rhetoric* includes human semiotics within this processes. To talk about rhetorics on processes differs from giving a plane list of instructions and attaches the idea that these actions must primarily entail human meanings, which include symbolic items

¹ From here on, RPG and RPGs for the plural.

such as words or images. By using them as a matter of meaning-making, the process is expected to take some initial conceptions and to achieve to exchange them by the intended new concepts the author wanted to put there.

Bogost refers to Aristotle rhetorics (15-28), which perform as pedagogics rather than as nowadays embezzled idea of manipulation; this drift seems an attempt to restrict procedural rhetorics into an educational context and runs away from a persuasive use in the name of marketing or brainwashing.

In this respect he also tries to avoid any misunderstanding or misuse of the term and makes a distinction with oratory (19-20), which refers political uses and bases its procedure on the speech instead on the process itself.

Earlier procedurality

Even before Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson released *Dungeons&Dragons* (Douse, McManus) human behaviour produced cultural elements that might be understood as an earlier form of procedural rhetorics. Although they might be considered as partially coincident with Bogost's former definition, it would be naive not to keep them in mind at least as a precedent.

Rituals based on scapegoat's sacrifice or absolution are a great example of how primitive discourses decided to solve incoming but ungovernable problems. "If no frustrating agent is present, then some object must be created for the purpose of relieving aggressive tendencies that arise in the frustrating situations" (Levy). Because these uncomfortable issues cannot be controlled, they socially trigger a series of arbitrary procedures that were invented with the will and the aim of solving them.

Although there is no scientific correspondence between a drought and the murder of a goat, after the process the meaning is moved from *unsafe* community to *saved* community. In this sense, any praying seems to act as a mantra that solves the stress in the subject; the more one repeats what are meant to be sacred words, the more "saved" the believer feels.

Pedagogics seem to be another milestone of procedurality, as Socrates dialectics reflect. "The Socratic practitioner attempts to help students clarify, justify and clearly articulate their own thoughts" (Boghossian; 18). This is done by an active process of analysing the starting point of the student and leading the thesis up to a different point that is supposed to stand in a higher level of knowledge. Here the teacher has the task of leading this procedure, while the rhetorics refer to their very bases in the Classic Age.

Peter Boghossian attaches some *do's and don'ts* concerning the rules the educator must follow with the student, who will contain the final result of the exercise. The primary objective will be considered achieved if that initial teacher's thesis match with the final student's one.

These forms of interactive change of the meaning peaked before videogames were even conceived as propaganda instruments. Contemporary marketing, raised during the second half of the Twentieth Century, developed what has been described as *Guerrilla Marketing*. This nomenclature resets the social space as a new social warfare that reminds us about Dyer-Witheford's "immaterial civil war" on the meaning.

There is a whole campaign behind it, with clear objectives and defined target groups; a team of think tanks conceived the main idea, the values surrounding the process and the way to succeed on the transmission of the message. But so far this does not entirely differ from traditional advertising techniques. Apart of a Demiurge acting as a *deus ex machina* on citizenry's reality, Guerrilla Marketing as a propaganda/advertising technique is not just understood as a plane message the user has to merely receive, but as an action that takes part in the recipient's space and pushes him to interact.

The term "guerrilla" means "small war" in Spanish, the kind of war a big army cannot counterattack due to its nature: small groups of militiamen attacking by surprise and with no patterns, taking the space without declaring it previously. In this sense, Guerrilla Marketing sets an interactive scenario the viewer must face, because he is not a passive viewer anymore. Interactivity becomes the key for achieving an experience that should result -if it finally works- in an acceptance of a given campaign values by the player. The rhetorics are not achieved by a celebrity on a poster, nor by the advice of an actor, but by the procedure itself.

Procedurality in RPGs

The analysis of RPGs as an earlier form of procedural rhetorics requires a proper definition of what a *role playing game* is. Here it is mandatory to distinguish between former RPGs, with rule books and a set of necessary material -dice, character sheets, leveling counters, etc.- and informal¹ participation in social psychodramas, such as the games kids set in which they may play the different roles within a family or the exercises actors use to improve their technique in which they try to mimic a wide spectrum of situations, from human to animal

¹ As the term "informal" includes acting, which is a job, I would like to remark that it does not refer to a lack of professionalism but to the fact that these exercises are not as ruled as former RPGs and give players a chance to go over the limits, to apply changes or to reset the standards in any moment.

environments; although this last form implies role playing as well and might serve to our purposes, we will consider it as a simpler expression of the whole RPG phenomenon.

A role playing game can be defined as one in which players assume the actions and consequences of a given group of characters within a fictional world that operates under a series of rules that narrow how powerful their actions can be. Like in a live novel, each player usually performs a single character while there is a “game master”¹ that controls the environment and describes what is going on and how the different actions modify the context. Most games include mathematical rules; “character sheets” are documents that define the skills of each actor in a numeric way and the use of dice adds some randomness and therefore uncertainty on whether the group will achieve what it is meant to be achieved or not.

We can ask then if every ruled RPG contains a game system that could refer mostly on procedures and a context or setting that may conclude into certain rhetorics.

Concerning procedurality, Bogost describes “procedural systems” as systems that “generate behaviors based on rule-based models; they are machines capable of producing many outcomes, each conforming to the same overall guidelines” (4). As RPGs are meant to solve common novelistic situations involving fight, proofs of knowledge and skill, even magic or random encounters, they do usually provide a series of rules explaining how these virtual realities behave within the diegesis of the story. This is a literal sense of computed procedurality in which the only change consists in substituting the digital processor by human actions; instead electrically calculating the result of an input, dice and numbers conclude the result a given player tries to reach and limit how successful or failed it is. By implementing math models such the Gaussian function, expected results become more possible than surprising outcomes; instead, some other games like *Dungeons&Dragons* imply heroic characters and care less about how faithful the game resembles reality for the benefit of an epic adventure.

A good example of determinism constricting certain freedoms is found in how Rolemaster -or its earlier version for *The Lord of The Rings*, MERP- works: when a player wants to perform an action, it is mandatory to roll two ten-faced dice which will output a value in between one and one hundred; if the result is exceptionally high the player will roll again; after that, the value for the skill the player is using, among any other positive modifier will be added while those values representing issues against the actions will be subtracted; the final result is matched in a table that explains what happens next.

¹ Also known as Dungeon Master on *Dungeons&Dragons*' terminology.

But there is another sense of procedurality. Players are not only meant to interact within the game system but to face narrative situations; the construction of these literary problems set players' minds in ways they were not expecting initially. As the plot advances the team is meant to cooperate: to choose whether an unethical but profitable action can be done or not, whether killing and looting money is more important than enjoying the plot, which skills should be chosen when leveling in order to get some advantage against the enemies, if it is worth of it to ask before shooting, to remember to use abilities like "inspecting" or "looking for traps" before going into an unknown room, etc.

A series of more complex actions can summarise into a corpus of general -or most commonly used- procedures. Even more, every person in a role play session can reflect ideology by the chosen procedures and by the way they are managed. While the game master sets some limitations to the actions, players are also meant to develop their own strategies; it is possible to guess how both sides set their own procedures and work together, some connivence allowed, in order to move the story forward.

But although roleplaying means to be free to explore and to do, everybody knows where the game is going. Quests like "killing the dragon" or "killing the president" refer to specific results that imply specific ways of assuming what is correct and what is not. In this sense Dungeons&Dragons appends the concept of alignment: players can behave as they usually do, but their characters follow certain ethical paths moving in two axis, one defining how much he or she is looking for good or evil and another describing the way the character achieves it, that oscillates between completely legal up to terribly chaotical. This might look like a way of forcing players to roleplay their characters and assume they behave in a way that it is not necessarily meant to match with their personal opinions.

John Hughes goes one step further and assumes that RPGs necessarily push players to assume this fantastic chimeras¹ as rules and limitations, that are as real -and as virtual- as real world ones:

"Roleplaying games create cultural systems as their avocation - worlds of imagination formed by the participants, given the constraints of their knowledge and the structure provided by the rules. Such creation works on all levels - material culture (architecture, fashion, etc.), ideology (politics, theories of power,

¹ I am referring to the symbolic system the game breeds and the social rules it stablishes, not to the game rules I talked before, that result into a constraint even for the creation of game's mythologies.

gender constructions) and cultural themes (what religion is, how magic works, the nature of good and evil, theories of destiny, ontology and epistemology). Fantasy roleplaying games have social structure, norms, values and a range of cultural artifacts which are as real as such constructs can ever be - that is, they are real to those who participate in them.”

Therefore, by entering game’s entelechy players assume certain norms that might be compared afterwards with norms in the real world. Procedures in the game engage, in a very Gestalt-alike way, similarities and dissonances with reality’s procedures that must be solved by choosing. The new rules provided, some of them challenge older ones, and the process of playing tests the functionality, suitability and Ethics of all of them.

This leads to the idea that certain rhetorics can be achieved by the process of playing itself. As Huge extends, “each group develops a universe of symbolic discourse” that could even refer to their own, true personality. As the session advances those virtual roles, which are identified with the player, take one path or another within the frontiers the game sets. And it is possible to expect that past choices shape future decisions, as choices themselves rebuild player’s criteria. Furthermore, certain choices in a fictional context might resemble real life situations; if so, these simulations may serve as a test field for real life, as an anteroom of real problems that are now being anticipated and trained for success.

In conclusion, although *procedural* does not exclusively refer to game system and *rhetorics* are achieved by the whole process of gaming inside a context full of iconic items but not just by the mere presence of them, RPGs seem to follow an analog process to persuasive video games: both set a series of procedural rules and icons that will be the matter the player will use for gaming, and from that interaction it will be possible to change his behaviour depending on the taken decisions.

Now it is time to analyse how certain RPGs get to set an attractive environment that, at the same time, modifies player’s points of view.

Dungeons&Dragons: a Taylorist experience

“Hack the dungeon, get the gold and lever up” would be the perfect epitaph for *Dungeons&Dragons*. Indeed, the game itself invites you to “kick in the dungeon floor, fight the monsters, and get the gold” (Cook, Tweet, Williams: “Rulebook”: 7). Severe changes have affected this game from its 1st edition to the last 4th, and, after more than three decades since its

first publication (idem: 4), the surviving items of this editing-selection seem to work “like a videogame”, as I once listened in a comic book shop.

The game lets the game master set a deep-immersion storytelling or rather a *kick-in-the-door* game (idem: 7-8); nevertheless this seems to be the path the different editions have followed during these three decades, going from a narrative context up to a thrilling action experience. Therefore some kind of author limiting will invites the game director to take an intermediate way in which action does not remove literature. But players’ choice is obvious: action prevails and that is why *Dungeons&Dragons*¹ carries the fame of being a “hack and slash” game rather a hyper realistic narrative one -such as *Rolemaster* (Charlton, Fenlon, Sharp) may be considered due to its emphasis on the system to the detriment of the game’s flow. This unfortunate image can be excused by the presence of miniatures in some *D&D* games, which could lead to an extremely arcade way of playing it.

No matter whether we are playing in a realistic or rather a heroic way, *D&D* specially sets metagame thinking as something that “should always be discouraged, because it detracts from real role-playing and spoils the suspension of disbelief” (idem: 11). Anyhow players must constrict their reasoning to the logic within the game world and not to the general, external logic of the game itself. *D&D* especially encourages the dungeon master to foil metagame thinking (idem: 12). It is an axiom that, if players will commonly play in an arcade way and that, if they will see their mindset constricted to the discourse of the game, there will be a convenience in between their style of gaming and their way of thinking. Thus, repetitive actions lead to repeated behaviours as repeated behaviours lead to habit.

Then *D&D* explains how actions, especially the ones relating to combat, must be solved. Broadly speaking, it is as easy as rolling a twenty-faced dice, adding your skills and scoring higher than the difficulty; even enemies have such a difficulty factor, which sets attacking someone under the same rules we could find in unlocking a door or sneaking through the guards. After all, combat appears as something common and accepted for solving problems; at least as common as the rest of the actions you can perform in the fictional world.

These actions are of course priced at the end of each adventure or game session (idem: 48-51). Depending on how many enemies were defeated, what kind, and many other factors like how good the character was interpreted, players get certain experience points. The game master is the ultimate judge in this process that will conclude with an improvement of the character’s skills. Although in games as *The Burning Wheel* (Crane, Dan) this score improves strictly the

¹ In advance, *D&D*.

used skills and takes into account how many success and failures the player had, *D&D* includes preset leveling trees.

However, every game needs an objective. If we put killing aside because killing may even be a milestone in every action adventure, the intentions or suppositions of a game can be also found in what its objective is. Some games use the objective to the mere act of role-playing; the mean becomes the meaning. In the case of *D&D* the dungeon master is asked with a simple question that give us a clear clue about what the objective is in this case: “What adventure would be complete without treasure?” (idem: 51). And follows:

“A close second in importance to experience points, treasure provides an important motivator for PC’s [Player Characters] to go on adventures. As with experience points, treasure empowers the PCs. The more they get, the more powerful they become” (idem).

Because playing *D&D* is about “getting powerful”. As nowadays capitalism or just as the early philosophies on industrial production, *Dungeons&Dragons* is about -and therefore it teaches how- hardly work for improving personal conditions: it is about getting more powerful, stronger and richer. This was even a subject of parody in *Munchkin*¹, a game by Steve Jackson that voluntarily removed any role-playing factor and got focused in killing and earning.

Cyberpunk 2020: test field to the future

Dyer-Whitford and his colleague Greig de Peuter, both new-media intellectuals with a Marxist background, talk on videogames as “*a paradigmatic media of Empire –planetary, militarized hyper-capitalism– and of some of the forces presently challenging it*” (“Games of Empire...”). But if we stated before that videogames can drive behavioural changes and that, at

¹ According to the socially constructed web Urban Dictionary (urbandictionary.com), the user “CerridwenStorms” informally defines “Munchkin” in the following terms -I spell-checked it myself-:

“The most annoying roleplayers you’ll ever have to deal with, who characteristically max out their stats, mostly without repercussion, play to mindlessly kill anything in their paths and boss the rest of your players around, and get as many dots or levels as possible. Most don’t really develop their characters’ personalities.”

Another user nicknamed “Crotchity Critch” adds:

“There is a very distinct difference between a munchkin and a paragamer... Munchkins play to win.”

the same time, videogames perform as a tool for and against the Establishment¹, why not to conceive that role-playing games may represent the same as well?

In 1993 R. Talsorian Games Inc. published *Cyberpunk 2020*, a well-know game in which present technology has been misplaced up to its very end. Players are suddenly surrounded by corporations and transhumanism where there is no place for our nowadays at-least-conceivable humanism, neither for human rights.

I found the introductory part very clarifying about what is expected from those who take the game seriously, which is what they will inherently agree during the gaming sessions:

“As Cyberpunk, you grab technology by the throat and hang on. You’ve got interface plugs in your wrists, weapons in your arms, lasers in your eyes, biochip programs in your brain. You become the car you drive, the gun you shoot... With cyborged fingers you pick computer locks; with the enhanced senses, you see into the Future. [...]

The world of Cyberpunk is a violent, dangerous place, filled with people who’d love to rip your arm off and eat it. The traditional concepts of good and evil are replaced by the values of expedience -you do what you have to do to survive. If you can do some good along the way, great.

But don’t count on it” (Pondsmith, Fisk, Moss...: “Cyberpunk 2020”: 3)

In its very beginning *Cyberpunk 2020* -involuntarily or not- brings contemporary topics into discussion. Some of them are slightly obvious: about what freedom should mean, whether an open politic on carrying weapons leads to a fairer social state or even if technocratic utilitarianism will be ever accepted as something trendy. Some other surrounding ideas can be extracted after a close reading of the them “Future”: medical techniques involving ethics on the use of stem cells, network communications above social interactions, cultural conflicts in a worldwide context -McLuhan’s *global village* in its paroxysm-, or the consequences of an imminent technological singularity².

¹ Here Establishment is used as a synonym for Dyer-Whiteford and De Peuter’s use of *Empire*: “planetary, militarized hyper-capitalism”.

² As Nick Bostrom, reputed professor at Oxford Martin School, director of the Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology at the University of Oxford describes as well as director of the Future of Humanity Institute describes *technological singularity* as the effect that happens when

But the game does not give certain responses to any question. As it is an open game in which game master and players must challenge the future from their knowledge of the present, two different in time depictions of what a society is are ill-fated to collide. Of course, the director of the game has some advantage in the choices the players will have as he sets the world and the adventure within it; somehow, the game master can lead them to certain decisions.

On the other hand, the players may find themselves facing new settings on reality, and maybe some they never conceived in real life as possible or even ethical. Depending on many factors -such as how difficult an action can be to do- their judgement could be lead or mislead. Although “how they make these choices will have a lot to do with whether they end up as vicious animals roaming a ruined world, or retain something of their basic humanity” (idem: 3).

The jobs the characters play differ from *Dungeons&Dragons* concept of heroism. While “barbarian” or “magician” refer to ancient or reviled professions nowadays, *Cyberpunk 2020*’s analogies trace real employments; and real employments bring us real implications. “Rockers, activists, hitmen, bodyguards, killers, soldiers, hackers, renegade mechanics, doctors, newsmen, reporters, cops, slick business raiders, multimillionaires, deal makers, smugglers, information brokers or nomad pirates“ (idem: 6-23) from the future do not really have to differ from their analogies of our time. Summarizing, problems from a close future are approached from the point of view of contemporary employments. This is, at least, a chance to guess how incoming issues will affect real people in not so many years from now. Of course, here a fictional context is provided and thus situations like self-armed guerrillas attacking a local police department are safe for everybody; therefore this is, also, a chance to predict future problems and act in advance.

Apart, the game includes an interesting description (idem: 127-174) of how hackers -known as *netrunners*- use a full terminology for referring which we would know as a further version of the Internet in terms of geography. By coining the “Net” as a “potential space” (idem: 128) the authors depict this vast network as a territory defined by electrical tensions and stored

“some sufficiently advanced and easily modifiable machine intelligence (a “seed AI”) applies its wits to create a smarter version of itself. This smarter version uses its greater intelligence to improve itself even further. The process is iterative, and each cycle is faster than its predecessor. The result is an intelligence explosion. Within some very short period of time —weeks, hours— radical superintelligence is attained.

Whether abrupt and singular, or more gradual and multi-polar, the transition from human-level to superintelligence would of pivotal significance. Superintelligence would be the last invention biological man would ever need to make, since, by definition, it would be much better at inventing than we are“ (“Superintelligence”).

data. If we already borrowed terms as “web site” or “chatroom” -or even “Cyberpunk”- from William Gibson’s science-fiction stories, how could we ignore that the use of this provided neo-language will push players to apply more fictional terminology to real items that are created in the present and, above all other things, are looking for a name?

Paranoia: “fun is mandatory”

George Orwell depicted a dictatorship-haunted world in his novel *1984*, in which dissident knowledge was as forbidden as free-thinking. Aldous Huxley defined a *Brave New World* where extreme science, relativism and unimportant society affairs stayed above any human consideration on the frontiers of development. Ray Bradbury wrote a book that would have been turned into flames if it had dared to appear within its own diegesis: *Fahrenheit 451*, or *the temperature that makes paper burn*. They three traced dystopias for their imminent future, a time that fortunately or not matches the time we are living in nowadays.

For sure none of them was one hundred-percent accurate but, maybe because of a matter of probability due to the big amount of predictions that were made or just because they made a good exercise of futuristic analysis, our time keeps certain similarities with those vintage concepts. Although rather than depicting the future from the present as we do in *Cyberpunk 2020*, here are the intellectual voices from the past claiming to be listened in the present; while *Cyberpunk 2020* emphasized the causes, here the consequences of bygone reckless politics are underlined.

Paranoia (Gelber, Costikyan, Goldberg) breeds an atmosphere in which dystopias became so real that there is no chance for drama but irony. Indeed, *Paranoia* sets a satiric environment in which nobody is meant to control the future, because future’s enhanced complexity can be exclusively handled by a despotic, paternalist Computer that reached to become smarter than humans.

“In PARANOIA you don’t know the rules. You don’t know who your enemies are. You don’t know how your equipment works. You’re never sure why you’re doing anything. One thing you do know: Everyone is out to get you.

Ignorance and fear; fear and ignorance. These are your watchwords. [...]

In PARANOIA you play a Troubleshooter in service to The Computer. Trust The Computer! The Computer is your friend! You are The Computer’s

trusted agent and protector of Alpha Complex, The Computer's underground city of the far future. [...]

...Are you sure this will be fun?

Certainly, citizen! Fun is mandatory. The Computer says so, and The Computer is your friend. Do you doubt The Computer? Doubting The Computer is treason." (Varney, Holloway, Gelber... :5)

As players have to interact with a context in which bureaucracy reached a kaffian process and where the functionality of everything states how nonfunctional the whole Computer's system is, the game seems to remark that science and efficiency can not contain the whole human condition. On the contrary, to unconditionally attach these two principles as the only ones leads to a failed society.

It seems an obligation to explain that, although our other two examples gave game master certain margin for controlling the environment, Paranoia gives him the possibility of designing the adventure while the pillars about where the game is going had been already established by the authors of the book, who lead everybody up to a certain point of skepticism about any idealistic future where technology made life perfect.

"What's a 'traitor'?"

A traitor is a malevolent human citizen who has betrayed his friend The Computer and seeks to destroy The Computer, Alpha Complex, humanity and life as we know it. You must unmask and destroy all traitors. Watch out! Traitors are everywhere!

Mutants are traitors. These genetic freaks have uncontrollable abilities they selfishly use for their own advancement, rather than to serve Alpha Complex. You must subdue or eliminate them.

Members of **secret societies** are traitors. In organizations unsanctioned by The Computer they conspire irresponsibly to undermine the good order of Alpha Complex. You must destroy them.

By the way... you are a mutant, and a member of a secret society. You are a traitor." (idem)

As in Orwell's novel, the game contains the figure of a great rebel, Mike-U-BCE, who as Emmanuel Goldstein represented the success of the system in its very beginning but that for some reason lost himself in between an idea: the revolution against The Computer, or The Big Brother. Of course, players are not meant to follow him but to chase him. Unfortunately the game, paradoxically provided by The Computer, is full of hidden messages talking about him. After all, if players get too annoyed with The Computer's procedures they can always look for subversion although that will be punished with death... And each player only has certain number of "clones".

As well, the game reminds us "What you must forget" (idem: 6): "solidarity among characters or players", "the quest for weapons and loot", "shaping a complex personality" and "comprehensive attributes, skills and combat options". It is therefore clear that, straightly facing *Dungeons&Dragons* principles, *Paranoia* attempts players to realize how bad selfishness and autocracy can be in a developed society by exposing how obvious these principles will make us fail nowadays, while the other game emphasizes teamwork and dedication in order to gain a better future.

Rolestanding

Someone rolled twenty and all the Dungeon Master could do was to cross out the name of a dragon. The beast remains dead; the characters compose themselves; a group of teenagers celebrate. In a while they will be splitting a treasure and walking back towards the Kingdom's capital. Later they will get some mother's dinner.

But the game does not end there; there is always a new epilogue, another page to be written. Further meetings might draw a village which is being periodically assaulted by a nomad gang, a sneak peek into a goblin dungeon or an inheritor facing the gates of death, poisoned by his brother.

Every one of this new chapters will set a scenario that does confront problems as it does with its analogies in the real world. Those who choose to enter the game will inherently agree with the fact that virtual issues may keep some resemblance with non virtual ones. A world made out of entelechies is, after all, a real life's test field.

As it has been exposed, videogames seem to be just a contemporary form of procedural rhetorics because this paradigm's scope reaches earlier corners of ludology. What can modify human behaviour through procedurality contemplates a wide range of practices, not just computerized ones.

Roleplaying does not simply introduce players into an imaginary environment but gives everybody a chance to try, a comfortable space for understanding how outter mechanics should work.

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