

THE PROMISED LAND IN CONTEMPORARY VIDEO GAMES: A MYTH ANALYSIS OF BIOSHOCK INFINITE AND DEATH STRANDING*

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INTRODUCTION: MYTH, MYTHEMES AND MYTH ANALYSIS

The continuity of cultural traditions over the centuries has relied on storytelling—either oral or written—as one of their main vehicles for survival and consolidation. Motifs, symbols, and structures are often repeated in the stories of the different civilizations over the course of history, giving rise to a tendency towards cultural sedimentation around explanations of the origins of the world, the meaning of human existence, and eschatological speculations. This historical repetition that reaches us like an echo from the past is what we call “myth”.

Myth has been a focus of interest in the 20th and 21st centuries, after a period of some neglect, thanks to research on the question from the perspectives of psychology (Freud, 2013; Jung, 2009; Rank, 1991), comparative religion (Campbell, 2014, 2015; Eliade, 1999, 2000), and (of special interest

for this article) structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, 2009; Barthes, 2012).

The structuralist approaches to mythology taken by Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, albeit with notable differences between them, view myth as a system of relationships, an articulated network of different elements that combine to form a structure of meaning. However, such strictly formal approaches to myth soon gave way to what was known as figurative structuralism, and subsequently called myth criticism (Gutiérrez, 2012: 181).

Myth criticism has its origins in the work of Gilbert Durand, and specifically, his book *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1982). Drawing on the concept of material imagination posited by his mentor, Gaston Bachelard (1960), Durand (1993: 36) suggests that “myth is configured as a narrative (mythical discourse) that introduces characters, situations, and valued objects, that can be segmented into smaller sequences or

semantic units (mythemes).” Myth is thus viewed as the “matrix model for all storytelling, structured according to basic schemes and archetypes” (Durand, 2012: 106) and it can be analysed in myth criticism through its mythemes.

According to José Manuel Losada (2015: 35), two or three mythemes are needed in a specific configuration for a myth to be said to exist, and this raises another common problem in myth analysis: the confusion between mytheme and theme. The repetition of a theme does not automatically make it a mytheme; this only happens when “a relevant theme takes part in the basic configuration of a unique myth” (Losada, 2015: 35).

WHILE MYTH CRITICISM IS LIMITED TO THE STUDY OF A TEXT FROM A MYTHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, MYTH ANALYSIS AIMS TO GO FURTHER

Having thus defined myth criticism as an analytical process focusing on mythemes, there is one final step to acknowledge that is central to this study: the step from myth criticism to myth analysis. While myth criticism is limited to the study of a text from a mythological perspective, myth analysis aims to go further. In the traditional text-context relationship, myth analysis broadens the field of action of the myth-critical approach to take an interest in “identifying the patent or latent myths that run through, ‘work on’, or underpin a given cultural moment” (Gutiérrez, 2012: 183). In this way, while myth criticism is limited to the textual analysis of a product (which may be literary, audiovisual, or interactive), myth analysis looks for the (explicit and/or latent) connections between the myths and the era to which that product belongs, in order to offer a sociological and cultural interpretation that goes beyond the object of study itself.

Apart from the analysis of video games with literally mythological subject matter (Cassar, 2013), there are as yet very few studies focusing specifically on the mythical nature of video games (Todor, 2010; Guyker, 2016; Galanina & Salin, 2017; Galanina & Baturin, 2019). Of the few studies that exist, it is the work of Manuel Garín (2009) that offers the most in-depth exploration of the specific features of the medium from a myth-critical perspective. Garín takes up Durand’s variables of rite, story, and icon, redefining the first of these in connection with gameplay as “ritual action” (Garín, 2009: 99). In this sense, “the video game deconstructs and disseminates the idea of myth, beginning with its primordial powers—rite, execution—to constitute it as a narration—story, text—in sounds and images—icon, audiovisual” (Garín, 2009: 99). The origin of the idea of gameplay ritual is linked to the notion of sacred, repeated, and participatory action that Johan Huizinga labelled *dromenon*, but also to other essentially performative elements, such as Durand’s notion of language as bodily expression or the idea of open and lived ritual fiction suggested by Eliade (Garín, 2009: 99-101).

While Garín’s proposition is essentially introductory and myth-critical, the primacy attributed to performative action in video games by action theories (Galloway, 2006; Planells de la Maza, 2015a) is not enough to make the leap to the level of myth analysis. That leap requires the addition not only of a logic of interaction determined by the player’s role and the “directed freedom” (Navarro Remesal, 2016) established by the system, but also of the configuration of the game’s fictional world (Planells de la Maza, 2018) as a network of mythemes, and the identification of explicit or latent myths, with attention to the socio-historical circumstances of the moment.

This article offers an approach to the myth of the Promised Land and its connection with contemporary video games from the perspective of myth analysis. Like the origin myth, the Promised

Land myth provides a society with both an ethical framework for action and a moral legitimization of its structures and institutions. In this sense, it is a construct that is essential for understanding the various ideological discourses and hegemonies in the community that has created the mythical narrative. It is thus particularly interesting and pertinent to analyse how the video game medium, one of the most popular media in the world today, channels this cultural and ideological heritage in its own way (Planells de la Maza, 2015b), and which elements of the contemporary foundational myths it replicates. To this end, I will begin by analysing the mythemes present in two canonical versions of the myth (the stories of Moses and Aeneas), and then consider how two contemporary video games, *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2007) and *Death Stranding* (Kojima Productions, 2019), make use of the classical mythemes, along with the specific mutations arising from the social and political context of their creation.

FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS: COMMON MYTHEMES

While in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and in Mesopotamian mythology in general, man is created out of clay moulded by a female divinity, in the Biblical tradition man is created by a male God in his image and likeness. In the first case, human beings are irrevocably imperfect, while in the second they are based on a model of perfection but fall from their perfect state into sin. According to David F. Noble (2005), this idea is what determines the difference between the finalistic acceptance of death as the natural end of life and the search for redemption and the restoration of perfection. Thus, “if the central message of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is ‘go home’, the central message of the Abraham saga is ‘go forth’” (Noble, 2005: 23), just as God tells Abraham himself in Genesis 12:1: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”

The divine promise of a new land is associated with a set of elements that are essential to understand the mythical narratives that contain it. On the one hand, it is a supernatural, divine order, given not to all humanity but to a single lineage or leader, and it therefore involves an obvious exclusion, separating the “chosen people” from all those who are not worthy of the promise. On the other hand, it is a redemptive, purifying act that transcends the human narrative by virtue of its connection to inevitable eschatological processes that are beyond human control (Noble, 2005: 18-52).

The leader and the chosen people are the common features of the two foundational myths chosen for this study: the Hebrew Exodus led by Moses, and the search for a new land by Aeneas and the survivors of Troy. While the Biblical tale of Moses establishes the religious and moral origins of the people of Israel (Amado Lévy-Valensi, 1992), it would be Virgil, in the 1st century B.C., who would take on the task of establishing a national mythical narrative, commissioned by Caesar Augustus, to give political and social legitimacy to the emperor’s new order. Leaving aside the myth of Romulus and Remus, which might have too readily reminded Romans of “the recent fratricidal war in which Augustus had finished off his brother-in-law and comrade Mark Anthony in a bloody fray” (García Gual, 2017: 169), the *Aeneid* turns its attention to a pre-existing mythical hero linked by ancestry to the new emperor. It is in the parallels and similarities between the two tales that we can find some of the common, central elements of the Promised Land myth. To do this, a good starting point is the study by Joaquín Mellado Rodríguez (2006), which compares Sargon, Moses, Romulus and Remus, and Habis, and establishes the following mythical structure:

A tyrant holds power or there is a situation of injustice or tragedy.

An extreme situation in which the hero is saved. This mytheme is generally expressed in the figure of a child or defenceless infant who,

by divine intervention, is saved from certain death, ironically being rescued by the enemy. Common features are wicker baskets made of reeds or papyrus and an important role for water, with the potential for the child to drown before being saved.

The hero becomes aware of his saviour role. Usually, it is a divine being that informs him of his holy mission (which is closely linked to his earlier salvation), and that gives him moral support and, sometimes, magical tools or special powers.

The people recognize the hero and he assumes his new position. This mytheme is generally associated with rebellion against the established power or open psychological and physical opposition. It also involves the assumption of the hegemonic role in the society of the time or the search for a new land where a separate settlement can be established.

The hero becomes a great lawmaker. The divinity gives the people laws and a moral framework that outlines both their internal organization and their external action.

In the stories of Moses and of Aeneas, this structure can be applied to the specific elements of each tale as we can see in table 1.

THE MYTH TODAY: FROM DIVINE PROMISE TO THE RELIGION OF TECHNOLOGY

José Manuel Losada suggests that the survival of any myth depends less on the challenges faced by individuals than on the evolution of each civilization, thereby placing myth within the sphere of cultural production. This necessarily entails a crisis for a myth when the inseparable connection between its mythemes and their combinations, the foundational element that identifies and differentiates a myth, is called into question (Losada, 2015: 42-43). In this sense, for Losada, there are different types of crises depending on the changes that the mythemes may undergo, ranging from the myth that is easily recognizable but with a slight distortion resulting from a change to one of its invariants, to the myth subverted by an inversion of elements that alters it in appearance only, and finally to a complete alteration, with numerous possible consequences such as making it difficult to identify, demystifying it, or erasing it altogether (Losada, 2015: 43-44).

The Promised Land myth, exemplified in the previous section by the mythemes of the Moses and Aeneas narratives, is no stranger to contemporary updates. One of its central elements is of course the divine origin of the promise, an element seems largely unsustainable in a modern rendering of the stories, given that contemporary positivism and rationalism would seem to question it openly. However, some studies have in fact shown that “modern technology and religion have evolved together and that, as a result, the technological enterprise has been and remains suffused with religious belief” (Noble, 1997: 5). According to Noble, it was in the 9th century that technology would begin to be perceived as an opportunity to overcome human weaknesses and, in turn,

Table 1. Mythological structure in Moses and Aeneas (based on Mellado Rodríguez, 2006)

Element	Moses	Aeneas
Tyranny or tragic situation	Pharaoh of Egypt	The fall of Troy
Extreme situation in which the hero is saved	The basket on the Nile	Intervention of Venus
Awareness of saviour role	The burning bush	The message from Creusa Anchises and the Underworld
Recognition and action	Rebellion and Exodus Journey across the desert	Search for the new land Wars with Turnus
The great lawmaker	Delegated, through the Ten Commandments	Direct, as leader of the exiles

to find salvation. Subsequently, technology as an expression of the divine in humankind and as a force for its self-betterment would be expressed in the Millenarianism of the 12th century, a trend that influences our society even today, which at that time predicted the imminent end of time and the coming of divine salvation. According to Noble, this quest for knowledge before the arrival of the glorious end-time can be seen in the writings of Francis Bacon and other founders of modern science, but also in the splitting of the atom and the development of the atomic bomb, where “the apocalyptic outlook of the weapons designers is, in essence, no different from that of the evangelist: the expectation of inevitable doom. And here too anticipation of annihilation is ‘blended’ with a belief in salvation” (Noble, 1997: 113). This religious-technological transcendence touches other fields, such as the moon mission, a literal departure from Earth in a quest for another promise, which President Nixon described as “the greatest week since the beginning of the world, the Creation” (Noble, 1997: 140), or the development of artificial intelligence and transhumanist visions, the latest great promise to move on from our imperfect bodies to an immortal digital system (Noble, 1997: 162).

The divine techno-religious promise took on a new dimension with digital culture. Following the elation brought by the advent of the telegraph, electricity, the telephone, radio and television (Mosco, 2004: 117-140), next it was the turn of digital technologies, especially the internet. Drawing on the ideas of Edmund Burke (1998), Vincent Mosco coined the term “technological sublime” to define the jubilant feeling inspired by a technological phenomenon that eradicates any rational perspective (Mosco, 2004: 23-24), an idea fully compatible with the expansionist policy referred to as the “silicolonization of the world” (Sadin, 2018). If technology can put us in a trance, the production model associated with technological sublimation should be Silicon Valley, the land of

successful start-ups, sunshine, and young visionaries. In this way,

Entrepreneurs and especially engineers embody the force capable of contributing to the improvement of general living conditions and, more broadly, from a teleological perspective, working decisively for the “salvation of humanity”. It is a crossover between theology and industry that has given rise to “technological messianism” (Sadin, 2018: 100).

BIOSHOCK INFINITE: MOSES AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Bioshock Infinite was produced by Irrational Games and distributed by 2K Games in 2013. It is one of the most widely studied titles in the field of Game Studies, from the perspectives of both neoliberal ideology (Pérez & Oliva, 2019) and religion (Wysocki, 2018). It is a first-person shooter game, characterized by a clash between the main game mechanics (combat) and the narrative focus (the character of Booker) (Pérez & Oliva, 2019: 3). The myth is thus located *in absentia*, i.e., as a background whereby the player can only perceive it in detail by paying attention to different objects distributed around the scene, such as signs, conversations, and audio recordings.

The game’s mythical narrative begins in 1890 with the tragedy of Wounded Knee, where US soldiers massacred hundreds of Native Americans of the Lakota tribe. One of the soldiers, Booker DeWitt, has been emotionally traumatized by the brutality of his own acts, driving him to alcoholism and gambling. Overcome with remorse, DeWitt goes to be baptized in the hope of being absolved of his sins, but at the last minute he rejects the idea. In 1891, DeWitt gets married and has a daughter, Anna DeWitt, but his wife dies in labour, driving him back to his alcohol and gambling addictions. After being kicked out of Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency because of his brutal methods, Booker goes into business

himself as a private investigator, but his gambling debts catch up with him. It is just at this moment that he decides to sell his daughter to a mysterious figure representing a man named Comstock, who offers to wipe out all his debts in exchange for the girl. Booker initially accepts, but then repents of his decision and chases the agent to a strange inter-dimensional portal, where he struggles unsuccessfully to take back his daughter. Desperate, Booker brands his daughter's initials on his hand and succumbs again to alcoholism. The game begins when the mysterious agent who had come to him to buy Anna hires Booker to break into Columbia, a city in the clouds, and rescue a girl named Elizabeth.

During the game, the player controlling Booker will discover that the moment when he rejected his baptism is a key to understanding the current situation. While in his world Booker rejected the act of atonement, in another possible world he accepted it and came out of the water not as the old Booker but as a new man, who took the name of Father Zachary Hale Comstock. This new, profoundly religious Booker claims that after his baptism he had a vision in which an archangel showed him the Promised Land in the form of a floating city. Nicknamed "The Prophet", Comstock created the cloud city of Columbia with support from the US government as part of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, using technology that was extremely advanced for its time. The city was designed to travel around the world in order to showcase the wonders of American exceptionalism. However, Columbia's unauthorized military intervention in the Boxer Rebellion led to a break with the US government. As an independent city, Columbia was now controlled by Comstock and his religious

THE TRAUMA OF THE MASSACRE LEADS THE CHARACTER TO BAPTISM AND ITS USE OF WATER AS A PURIFYING AND REGENERATIVE FORCE: BOOKER DIES AND IS REBORN AS COMSTOCK

and moral vision, resulting in a constant battle between two factions: Comstock's Founders, and the anarchist group Vox Populi.

At this point, *Bioshock Infinite* becomes a game of mirrors and counterfactual confusions. Booker's daughter Anna is adopted by Comstock, who gives her the name of Elizabeth. While Columbia's civil war rages, Booker will save Elizabeth and ultimately recognize that she is Anna. He will also realize that there is only one way to get rid of Comstock: by returning to the moment of his baptism and sacrificing himself to close the rift between worlds.

In *Bioshock* it is not Booker but Comstock who appears as a new Moses, and the foundational myth is constructed on the basis of his extremist vision.

The first mytheme is the tragic situation. The Battle of Wounded Knee represents a moral turning point for the hero, but it is also one of the most shameful moments in US history (Venegas, 2017: 198). The massacre would lead to the hero's fall and would set up the future consequences that unfold in the game.

Based on this tragic background, the second mytheme places the protagonist in the position of salvation. The trauma of the massacre leads the character to baptism and its use of water as a purifying and regenerative force: Booker dies and is reborn as Comstock. It is a process of transformation for one who seeks an answer in the comfort found in faith, a ritual that will establish a cyclical logic; at the end of the game, the transformative water and redemptive baptism will turn into drowning and conscious sacrifice.

The hero's salvation must be followed by the supernatural event that justifies his new mission



Baptism as rebirth

and new role. In this case, Comstock, as he himself explains, is visited by an archangel. When he receives the promise, Comstock (like Moses) doubts his own abilities:

And then, the archangel showed a vision: a city, lighter than air. I asked her: “Why do you show this to me, archangel? I am not a strong man. I am not a righteous man. I am not a holy man.” And she told me the most remarkable thing: “You’re right, Prophet. But if grace is within the grasp of one such as you, how can anyone else not see it in themselves?”

Comstock’s conviction about his new role links into the fourth mytheme: community recognition and causal action. In this case, Columbia constitutes the creation of a new society fuelled by sublime technology, a technological New Eden that quickly outdoes the United States with its tall buildings suspended in the air, its patriotic optimism, its advanced weaponry, and its *trans-humanist* biotechnology in the form of the energy drinks known as “Vigors”. The creation of the new nation has an interesting historical parallel with the Mayflower pilgrims who left Britain to found Plymouth in the New World. Both Columbia and Plymouth received the blessing of powerful nations and both eventually broke away from those nations to follow their own path (Venegas, 2017: 193). However, lurking in the heart of the utopia is a dissent represented by Vox Populi and the Civil War that will plunge Columbia into chaos and bring about its doom.

At the same time, Columbia represents the mystification of technology, as reflected in



The wrath of God: Columbia attacks New York

Booker’s visions of New York being bombed by the floating city. Tying in with Millenarianism and its apocalyptic visions, Columbia is not only Eden but also Judgement Day, the ultimate weapon to purge all impurity from the human race. Comstock’s point of view is clear: “Even God is entitled to a do-over. And what is Columbia, but another ark for another time” that can serve to eradicate “the Sodom below”?

The culmination of the mythological structure is the emergence of the great lawmaker. Columbia, the female personification of the United States, broke away from the motherland on the understanding that the end of the American Civil War constituted a betrayal of the fundamental values of the nation. Comstock builds a religious society that is fundamentalist, authoritarian, nationalistic (idolizing the Founding Fathers) and racist, which views the abolition of slavery as a mistake and Abraham Lincoln as a devil. Comstock’s political legacy has two key pillars: the establishment of American exceptionalism as a blueprint for the future, and the alteration of history to legitimize it.

Exceptionalism is the American nationalist doctrine that claims that the United States is distinct from any other country, that it has a special civilizing mission and, therefore, is wholly superior to any other nation (Venegas, 2017: 184). All these ideas figure in Comstock’s political vision and are sustained by a dramatic alteration to history. In this respect, it is telling that Columbia has a museum and centre for the interpretation of

Wounded Knee, the source of the original trauma but now transformed into a means of legitimizing the divine promise. The massacre becomes a battle, and the moral disgrace becomes a glorification.

DEATH STRANDING: A SCEPTICAL AENEAS BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL AND THE DIGITAL

In 2019, Sony launched *Death Stranding*, the long-awaited new title by the inimitable Hideo Kojima. In a bleak future, humankind has been decimated by the “Death Stranding”, a phenomenon that has fused the worlds of the dead and of the living, thereby creating personal intermediate realms known as “Beaches”. This catastrophe has led to the appearance of “Beached Things” (BTs), souls of the dead trapped in our world, who when coming into contact with the living cause what are known as “Voidouts”, explosions resulting from the combination of matter and antimatter. It has also resulted in “Timefall”, a kind of rain that speeds up the ageing process of whatever it touches because of the presence in the water of chiralium, a material from the world of the dead that has seeped into the world of the living. In this context, a cargo courier named Sam Porter receives a mission to reconnect the country by means of a network of “knot cities” from coast to coast.

At the same time, he must rescue his sister Amelie, a potential successor to the presidency of the United Cities of America (UCA) following the death of its last president, Bridget Strand.

While reconnecting knot cities, Sam discovers two things. First, he experiences visions through his connection with a Bri-

dge Baby (BB) named Lou, a baby he takes with him that enables him to see BTs. These visions will ultimately reveal the truth that he was experimented on as a baby and that his father, Clifford Unger, tried to free him but died in the attempt, along with Sam himself. Sam came back to life because he was a “repatriate”, an individual with the power of resurrection. Secondly, he discovers that the Death Stranding is actually an extinction process and that it is not the first but the sixth in a series of such processes. He also finds that Amelie is actually an Extinction Entity (a being that triggers the extinction), and that she is also Bridget, his adoptive mother (when he realizes he is Clifford and Lisa’s son). Finally, Sam will convince Amelie not to destroy the world, and he will leave the UCA to start a new life with Lou.

Sam’s adventures require him to carry heavy loads and to brave bandits, BTs, terrorists (from the group Homo Demens, led by Higgs), and even rough terrain. *Death Stranding* is a game in which the weight of every step is palpable for the player and every small advance is a major victory. Each reconnected knot in the digital world is also a step closer to the personal world, to little traumas, memories, and requests. It is this journey from one point to the next in a quest to rebuild the nation that makes Sam a kind of Aeneas, albeit with a

Sam takes the West



very contemporary twist.

The first mytheme is the Death Stranding, serving as the tragic situation that destroys society as we know it. This inexplicable and unforeseeable event wipes out most of humankind, leaving the Americans as the only survivors. This mass destruction scenario then moves onto the second mytheme: a

post-apocalyptic society governed by a weak new government that attempts to gain control over the chaos and the law of survival of the fittest. The voidouts and BTs are the remains of Troy in which Sam, an ordinary man in an extreme situation, is forced to transport cargo to survive. Although Sam is a member of the Strand family, he feels a profound aversion to the social and also to the physical, partly due to haphophobia, or fear of being touched. It is only when the holographic (ghostly) image of his sister Amelie asks him to rescue her that he takes on the saviour role, i.e., when the third mytheme appears.

The question of ghosts is another central element of the game. While the *Aeneid* presents the voyage to the underworld and back as a process exclusive to certain heroes, Kojima's game fuses the two worlds to turn them into a single world where the living and dead coexist. Added to the heroism of the average man is the threat of the underworld and its eschatological dimension: extinction will occur when the world of the dead definitively takes over the world of the living. Instead of being a place of knowledge (the next world in classical tradition), here it becomes a threatening place, where liquid evokes the finite duration of existence (the rain) and climate



Clifford, Sam's Anchises

change (the black viscous liquid and the whale-like BTs).

The idea of the ghost also emerges in the intensive use of holograms as a means of communication, in the figure of Amelie as a supernatural being, and in the visions of Sam's father. This last point is very prominent in Virgil's poem, in which Aeneas has five warning dreams, one of which is with his father. Similarly, Sam reconstructs his history based on visions up to the moment of the final spectral encounter with his father, where the process of anagnorisis occurs.

The fourth mytheme is central to the game: the reunification of the UCA. Sam Porter adopts the surname Bridges, co-opted by the company that he delivers cargo for. A metaphorical confusion arises between the United States and Bridges, between public and private worlds, as the logo of Bridges is also the logo of the new nation. This nominal functionalism is common throughout the game: "Deadman" is so-called because he is a kind of modern Frankenstein's monster; "Die-Hardman" because he was hard to kill in the war (thanks to Clifford); "Mama" because of her BT link with her baby; "Fragile" because she is not fragile; and "Amelie" is a combination of *amé* ("soul" in French) and the English word "lie".

ELEMENT	MOSES	AENEAS	BIOSHOCK INFINITE	DEATH STRANDING
TYRANNY OR TRAGIC SITUATION	Pharaoh of Egypt	The fall of Troy	Wounded Knee	Death Stranding
EXTREME SITUATION IN WHICH THE HERO IS SAVED	The basket on the Nile	Intervention of Venus	Baptism	Post-apocalyptic society
AWARENESS OF SAVIOUR ROLE	The burning bush	The message from Creusa Anchises and the Underworld	Archangel	Amelie's request
RECOGNITION AND ACTION	Rebellion and Exodus Journey across the desert	Search for the new land Wars with Turnus	Creation of Columbia	National reconnection (UCA)
THE GREAT LAWMAKER	Delegated, through the Ten Commandments	Direct, as leader of the exiles	Exceptionalism	Departure from community

Table 2. Comparison of structures between stories and games (based on Mellado Rodríguez, 2006)

The relationship between the rebuilding of the nation and Sam's role resembles the situation described by Virgil in his poem, and also constitutes the structural foundation of the Western film genre: a new nation is possible through the regeneration of a past and the conquest of new territories in the West. However, while Aeneas (or the American settler) is convinced of his mission, Sam is depicted as a pawn, a man driven more by circumstances than by his faith in his nation. In a reflection of our times, Sam shifts from personal connection and empathy for unknown individuals on the physical level to invasion of privacy on the digital level. The more he helps his neighbour, the more he contributes to the creation of a company-government where he is merely one more cog in a systemic precariousness that dooms him to a cyclical existence of transporting cargo and being paid in likes.

Notwithstanding Sam's explicit intentions, the reality is that his human connection with the different knot cities effectively reunifies the territory and prevents extinction, but he will not be able to embrace this new social context. This leads to the fifth and final mytheme. Both Aeneas and Sam see the fruit of their civilizing action, but Sam, like Ethan in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956),

cannot stay. The creation of his new society will not be in the UCA, but in Lou, the baby he decides to care for and with whom he closes the father-child cycle that underpins much of this Promised Land story.

CONCLUSIONS

The structural elements of the Promised Land myth—a tragic situation, the salvation of the hero, his acceptance of the saviour role, recognition by the community, and his emergence as a lawmaker—take on an interesting new expressive dimension in the contemporary video game, as can be seen in the synopsis shown in table 2.

The context of the current trend of digitalization, along with the *techno-religious* tradition associated with the sacralization of technology, has had a significant impact on the divine promise; from a transcendent manifestation (the burning bush in Moses' story; Venus in Aeneas') to a deification of human achievements as a sign of human redemption and perfection.

It is precisely this mutation of the myth that serves as the foundation for *Bioshock Infinite*, a ludic reflection that emerges in the context of the disconnect between an action game and the myth

used as its background. The references to American exceptionalism, accentuated in the Trump era, are mixed with the traditional divine promise by an archangel and the transcendent techno-religion of supremacy in war, an element that ties in with US paternalism in the 20th and 21st centuries.

On the other hand, *Death Stranding* evokes the Aeneas myth in its rebuilding of a nation with an echo of the myth of the American West, associating it with our contemporary society through the digital connection, neoliberalism, and social media. Kojima uses reunification to give meaning to the physical load of the journey and the importance of physical contact, but also to reflect on the impact of social media, digital culture and the precarious conditions produced by an increasing confusion between government and private enterprise.

In this way, the two video games analysed show how the Promised Land myth, far from having lost much of its transcendent meaning, serves as a basic structural model today for understanding both the future in the video game itself and the social, political, and economic contradictions of our times. For future research, it would be of interest not only to add to the catalogue of mythical narratives that find a place in contemporary video games (in terms of both their narrative expression and their mechanics), but also to analyse the extent to which these mythical discourses are perceived by the player and, in general, what appropriation strategies and processes players engage in during the gameplay experience. ■

NOTES

- * Project supported by a 2019 Leonardo Grant for Researchers and Cultural Creators, BBVA Foundation.

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THE PROMISED LAND IN CONTEMPORARY VIDEO GAMES: A MYTH ANALYSIS OF BIOSHOCK INFINITE AND DEATH STRANDING

Abstract

The traditional creation of nations and states has made use of the Promised Land myth as a means of political and religious legitimation. The purpose of this article is to compare how this myth has been reinterpreted in contemporary video games. To this end, the mythemes of the stories of Moses and Aeneas serve as the basis for a myth analysis of two games dealing with foundational experiences: *Bioshock Infinite* and *Death Stranding*. The findings reveal the persistence of the mytheme structure of the classical myth, although with mutations of its motifs to convey the promise of the techno-religion and the sceptical post-modern hero.

Key words

Video games; Myth; Promised Land; Foundation; Myth Analysis; Mythemes.

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Article reference

Planells de la Maza, A. J. (2021). The Promised Land in Contemporary Video Games: A Myth Analysis of *Bioshock Infinite* and *Death Stranding*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 31, 117-130.

LA TIERRA PROMETIDA EN EL VIDEOJUEGO CONTEMPORÁNEO: MITOANÁLISIS DE BIOSHOCK INFINITE Y DEATH STRANDING

Resumen

La creación tradicional de naciones y estados encontró en el mito de la Tierra Prometida un sustento político-religioso clave para su legitimación. El objetivo del presente artículo es contrastar cómo se ha trasladado dicho mito al videojuego contemporáneo. Para ello, partimos de los mitemas de los relatos de Moisés y Eneas para realizar el mitoanálisis de dos juegos sobre experiencias fundacionales: *Bioshock Infinite* y *Death Stranding*. Los resultados muestran cómo la estructura de mitemas del mito clásico persiste, si bien algunos de sus motivos han mutado hacia la promesa de la tecnoreligión y el héroe posmoderno escéptico.

Palabras clave

Videojuegos; Mito; Tierra Prometida; Fundación; Mitoanálisis; Mitemas.

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Referencia de este artículo

Planells de la Maza, A. J. (2021). La Tierra Prometida en el videojuego contemporáneo: mitoanálisis de *Bioshock Infinite* y *Death Stranding*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 31, 117-130.

Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com

