

# Sacred Spaces in the Video Game World

By Ioannis Xidakis\*

## Introduction

What is the special feature of the “sacred space”? The very designation “sacred” automatically differentiates it from everything else. The determination of the sacredness of a space functions simultaneously as a description, as a distinction from other spaces but also as its classification in a context of different properties and conditions. Therefore, in order to better understand the subject, that is, the elements of the sacred space and especially the way in which various sacred spaces, such as temples, altars, monasteries, appear within the virtual worlds of video games, it is necessary to initially give a definition of “sacred” as a particular set of elements and features.

So, how is the sacred defined? Various studies –religious, sociological and anthropological– mainly attempt to compare it with something non-sacred and thus present it as a particular space, time or as a set of properties. Based on these studies it becomes clear that, in terms of research, recognition and connection of the sacred with traditional society and traditional religion, that which is recognized as sacred bears recurring features, although it is not presented in a unified way.

What this study finds interesting is that precisely these motifs of the sacred, and in particular of the sacred space, are an integral part of various plots of neomythology, namely modern mythology, as it is specifically expressed through modern recreation and entertainment products, including video games. In other words, if the plot of a video

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game presents a sacred space, what is perceived by the virtual character/hero and by the player as sacred is presented in a way that can be compared with the corresponding traditional one, adapted of course to the requirements of the game's plot.

Regarding the descriptive view of the sacred in the context of the studies, we first note that this, in relation to everyday space and time, is defined: a. as something completely different from the everyday environment but at the same time directly related to it; b. as that which, being different, belongs exclusively outside the social – everyday context, and c. as that which through its expression by society and religion is projected as the essence of civilization itself.

In particular, scholars such as Émile Durkheim, Roger Caillois, Mircea Eliade, René Girard, Reimon Berger and Peter Bachika emphasize the distinction between sacred and profane and indeed with the significance of two completely different conditions of existence<sup>1</sup>. However, this distinction of the sacred and the divine from the profane, that is, the everyday, is recognized more as an antithesis and at the same time an interrelation of these two states, rather than as a radical dichotomy. For example, Caillois speaks of the limited, careful and conditional, i.e. through ritual procedures, entry of man into the world of sanctity and purity<sup>2</sup>. Durkheim treats the sacred as something protected and isolated from everyday life, but at the same time describes rites of passage and initiation processes into this world of the sacred<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, Eliade recognizes between the sacred and the profane two ways of existence of the world<sup>4</sup>. But by linking the category of “sacred” to that of “space”, he

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1. Ém. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, transl. K. E. Field, Free Press, New York 1995; R. Callois, *Man and the Sacred*, transl. M. Barash, The Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois 1959; M. Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, transl. W. R. Trask, Harcourt Orlando 1987; R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, transl. P. Gregory, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1989; Reimon Bachika, “On the Sacred and the Profane”, pp. 159-178, 160, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ON-THE-SACRED-AND-THE-PROFANE-Bachika/b85d0a8f92c8ce17d071654f476a41c327a1eb8c> (6.2.2021); P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Open Road Integrated Media, New York 2011.

2. Caillois, *op.cit.*, pp. 39, 54.

3. Durkheim, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

4. Eliade, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

gives a unifying character to what is recognized as sacred and divine. The sacred with its catalytic presence in everyday space, for example in the form of a temple, allows, as he says, communication between cosmic levels, between heaven and earth<sup>5</sup>. According to Bachika, Girard and Berger, the sacred as superior, terrible, mysterious and transcendent is clearly distinguished from man and his reality. But at the same time it tends to diffuse towards the profane, to enclose man and relate to him closely and in various ways, to dwell in everyday objects<sup>6</sup>.

Marcel Mauss places the sacred outside the everyday space and its typical, ordinary practices. According to him, it is a special category of objects, which are clearly distinguishable from everyday life<sup>7</sup>. Similar to Mauss, more recent scholars also draw a line between sacred and non-sacred, i.e. profane. Phillip Hammond defines the sacred as a reality that transcends the empirical<sup>8</sup>, while Berger describes it as unusual, and therefore potentially dangerous<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, the sacred can be viewed as a separate category of properties, roles, persons and things, time and space. It is noteworthy, however, that it is presented in its definition as something that is not completely identical with good. In this way, it is seen as both a source of good within the community and a cause of evil, that is, a disaster or disease that may affect the whole community or some of its members.

On the issue of the dual function and nature of the sacred, Girard's study of the way traditional societies give meaning and utilize through this meaning the sacred is special. According to him, the community recognizes that the separation of the sacred from the social can prove dangerous<sup>10</sup>, but also that the union between them can ultimately prove equally harmful<sup>11</sup>. This is due to the fact that the world of the unformed

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5. Eliade, *op.cit.*, pp. 20, 30, 58, 63.

6. Bachika, *op.cit.*, p. 161; Girard, *op.cit.*, pp. 31, 258, 312; Berger, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

7. M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, transl. R. Brain, Routledge, London 2005, p. 147.

8. Ph. E. Hammond, *The Sacred in a Secular Age: Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1985, p. 167.

9. Berger, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

10. Girard, *op.cit.*, pp. 258, 267-268.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32, 58, 242, 251, 257.

sacred is the world outside the community<sup>12</sup>. What belongs to this sacred world can eventually be tolerated and permitted within the human world, but only through prohibitions and rules, the most effective expression of which is observed in the regulatory framework of ritual sacrifices<sup>13</sup>. In other words, traditional societies seek to control through sacrificial rituals and ultimately exorcise this dual nature of the sacred, transforming it from potentially destructive (maleficent violence) to beneficial and useful for the community and the world around it (beneficent violence)<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, the sacred, in Girard's view, is described as that secular reality which is distinguished from the social one, but at the same time as that element which structures, composes and strengthens society. However, it is not only Girard who describes the cosmological and social character of the sacred. Scholars like Eliade and Berger, based on the role of the sacred, on the way it is understood, and deciphered through myths, traditions and rituals, underline its dual character, essentially without separating its social impact from the cosmological one.

Eliade emphasizes that the sacred manifests itself in different instances within everyday life, defining cosmic space and time as reality. In other words, the sacred constructs the world and the cosmic order, that is, it defines as a fact that the world exists and is organized as a set of elements<sup>15</sup>. This cosmological character of the sacred is also pointed out by Berger, who accepts that the sacred world is that which transcends and encloses man, arranges his daily life and gives form to it<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, Caillois sees the sacred as something completely different from the profane, that is, from the world of men<sup>17</sup>. The sacred, because of its diversity and its association with everything else that is not it, can contribute to the cohesion of the world order if it is controlled by man through purification rituals. Otherwise it risks acting as a force of destruction and dissolution<sup>18</sup>.

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12. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 282.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 219, 312.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

15. Eliade, *op.cit.*, pp. 10, 12, 14, 28, 30, 63, 95, 97.

16. Berger, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

17. Caillois, *op.cit.*, pp. 19, 34, 54.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 38.

It is precisely this peculiarity of the sacred, and in particular its contradictory function, that Girard points out when analyzing its characteristic features, as we saw above. For him, the sacred functions as that force which presses or oppresses man by exercising power, while being at the same time an agent of order or disorder, peace or war, creation or destruction. The community fears this force, but at the same time recognizes that it owes its very existence to it<sup>19</sup>.

The cosmological-social usefulness of the sacred is repeated in the scholar's observations. For example, Veikko Anttonen associates the sacred with the transcendent reality, which is manifested within the human world through the various forms of religious experience. He characterizes this sacred reality as a defining element of society's identity<sup>20</sup>. For Hans Mol and Carsten Colpe, the sacred is the very cause of religion, the essence of religious life, as well as the prerequisite for maintaining order and security in the social space<sup>21</sup>.

Gerard van der Leeuw connects these two states, namely sacredness and sociality, focusing his research on the sacred space and the way it is understood within the social context. He observes that traditional societies recognize sacred space as a dual environment: a. as the center of their power and as a world parallel to their community, but also b. as an area that remains independent of the boundaries of the community<sup>22</sup>. This sacred space seems to have two structural features: on the one hand, it inspires in people feelings of fear and respect, that is, general awe<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, it is a space open to possibilities, which man can exploit

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19. Girard, *op.cit.*, pp. 31, 242, 258, 267.

20. V. Anttonen, "What Is It That We Call 'Religion': Analyzing the Epistemological Status of the Sacred as a Scholarly Category in Comparative Religion", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12, 1 (2000), pp. 195-206, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006800X00111> (18.2.2021).

21. H. Mol, *Identity and the Sacred: Sketch for a New Social Scientific Theory of Religion*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1976, pp. 6, 109, 203, 205, 206, 214, 220, 265; C. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane", in: L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, Thomson Gale, New York 2005, pp. 7964-7978, 7964, 7971.

22. G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in essence and manifestation*, transl. J. E. Turner, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1986.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

by delimiting the divine and placing it within his settlement in the form of sacred space<sup>24</sup>.

What is remarkable is that it is precisely this connection between the sacred and the social, the understanding of the sacred as the starting point for the existence of reality itself, and even more so its conceptualization, according to Leeuw, as a space open to various possibilities, that is repeated to some extent, as we shall see below, in plots of contemporary popular culture products. In the plots of video games in particular, the sacred is dominant, having similar features to those that scholars distinguish when they associate it with the profane. However, the way in which these elements, i.e. the sacred and the non-sacred, coexist and the motifs resulting from this coexistence and their interconnectedness demonstrate a new understanding of sacred space, consistent with the motifs of neomythology.

By this term we refer to modern mythology that appears as part of the diffused new religiosity, which is linked in its emergence and evolution to postmodernity, that is, to all those radical social, economic and technological changes that have taken place in the Western world since the middle of the 20th century. The term “diffused” characterizes contemporary religiosity that does not manifest itself through movements, groups, organizations and is distinguished for its dynamic expression through art, literature, television and other media.

In this neomythology, that is, in the various plots of its equally diverse products, such as manga, comics, and video games, a dominant position is occupied by the sacred space as the territorial area associated with something supernatural and contrasted in its content to the everyday and ordinary space.

In the neomythological world of video games in particular, sacred space has instantly recognizable elements, as it is presented in their plots<sup>25</sup> either as a place of worship and communication with the divine or as a space associated with the religious tradition of a community. At the same time, however, it carries new mythological motifs, that

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 399.

25. How sacred space is described in the plots of the video games differs, as we shall see, from the way it ultimately functions during the gameplay.

is, particular imaginary features that are found within the context of virtual reality, such as: the temple as an important part of the digital city and the virtual world, as a symbol of religion or center of magic, as a residence of supernatural entities but also as a place of production of magical objects and technological tools, as a means of conquering the digital opponent, as a means of achieving the virtual hero's goal, as a place claimed by them and their antagonist, even as the seat of cosmic evil against cosmic good.

The purpose of this article is precisely to highlight this modern mythical context of video games, which develops and reproduces specific motifs for the sacred space, which, as we saw above, are distinguished by the combination of elements of traditional religiosity (e.g. the sacred space as dwelling-place of deities) but also –and this is the core of our research– of motifs of diffused religiosity, such as the connection between magic and technology or the redefinition of religion and the divine element in general.

In the following pages, and in accordance with the purpose we set, we will approach and analyze how the world of video games sets the boundaries and properties of sacred space in the form of sacred buildings. Using elements of traditional religiosity and mythology, but presenting them in a new way, video games redefine the sacred space and place it within the permeable framework of a new myth, that is, within the boundaries of a constantly evolving mythology.

## The neomythology

In plots of entertainment products of modern Western civilization, such as science fiction films, comic books and video games, one can observe a combination of fantasy and reality, illogical and logical elements. This combination is traditionally present in the product of the human spirit known to us as myth. Based on this assumption, it can be said that the mythical element dominates contemporary entertainment products. Their plots are mythologies.

Their mythologies, however, are formed on the basis of a central motif: religious terms, symbols, and religious and mythical figures of world

history are removed from their natural environment, that is, from their religion, and are reinterpreted by composing a new mythology.

In other words, we see reflected or expressed in the new media the tendency to reinterpret elements of the teaching of traditional religions and myths of the past and redefine them in a new context. The very same tendency is seen in New Religiosity –and especially in the diffused New Religiosity– as well as in one of its most prominent aspects, that which is known as “modern” mythology or “neomythology”. It is often the subject of various art forms such as literature, cinema (science fiction films, anime etc.), superhero comic books, and more recently video games<sup>26</sup>.

New Religiosity, as the theoretical framework of neomythology, is that non-traditional religiosity which is formed through the teachings and practices of the New Religions<sup>27</sup>. These are religions that are connected in terms of their emergence and evolution with the new, with the ‘modern’, with *modernity* and *postmodernism*, that is, with all those changes that have taken place in the Western world since the 19th and 20th centuries, especially since the 1960s (*postmodernism*)<sup>28</sup>.

In this context of New Religiosity, unlike New Religions which generally have a specific doctrine and structure, diffused religiosity consists of freely moving ideas and practices expressed in various media<sup>29</sup>. Based on the

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26. Irv. Hexham & K. Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred*, Westview Colorado 1997, pp. 92-94, 152-154; W. J. Hanegraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: a Historian’s Perspective”, *Social Compass*, 46, 2 (1999), pp. 145-160, 153, 158; <https://scp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/46/2/145> [20.2.2023]; M. Rothstein, “UFOs”, in: P. B. Clarke (ed.), *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 648-649, 649.

27. St. Papalexandropoulos, «Οί Νέες Θρησκείες: Ίστορική έπισκόπηση και συστηματική θεώρηση», in: *idem.*, *Δοκίμια Ίστορίας τών Θρησκειών*, Hellinika Grammata Publications, Athens 1997, pp. 143-179, 153; C. Campbell, “The Easternisation of the West”, in: Br. Routledge & Jamie Cresswell (eds.), *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, Routledge, London 2001, pp. 35-48, 37; D. G. Bromley & J. G. Melton, “Challenging Misconceptions about the New Religions-Violence Connection”, in: D. G. Bromley & J. G. Melton (eds.), *Cults, Religion, and Violence*, Cambridge University Press 2004, pp. 42-56.

28. Irv. Hexham & K. Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred*, Westview Press 1997, Colorado, pp. 36, 37, 147-151.

29. Io. Xidakis, «Μετανεωτερικότητα και Διάχυτη Θρησκευτικότητα», *Θεολογία / Theologia* 92, 1 (2021), pp. 151-178, <https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/press/theologia/in-dex>.



above definition, we obviously understand that diffused religiosity, being part of the New Religiosity and having the ability of permeability, i.e. the ability to express itself in multiple ways, is a phenomenon that begins before the period of postmodernism. But after the 1960s and 1970s, with the widespread use of new media such as television and video games and in the context of the new social and cultural fermentations of those decades, diffused religiosity is gaining new momentum. This form of new religiosity essentially develops alongside or often under the influence of postmodernism and can be defined as contemporary diffused religiosity.

Neomythology is the most popular manifestation of contemporary diffused religiosity. As far as the fluidity and versatility of the neomythological space allows, its main motifs are:

The inclusion of the absolute, i.e. the divine, within the limits of the world. In no way is this divine something else, something different that is completely outside of history, matter, the world. Within this “cosmotheistic framework” (a term St. Papalexandropoulos uses to describe the space of New Religiosity) the divine is secularized, i.e. localized and confined to the space of the physical world. It is precisely this identification with the physical space and its tangible elements that results in its “scientificization”, that is, the tendency to be explained in supposedly scientific terms<sup>30</sup>.

A derivative of cosmotheism, the inclusion of the divine, the transcendental element, in the material and explicable world, is the objectification of the divine, i.e. the treatment of god as an object that will enhance a positive situation or bring about a negative one, will help someone or harm someone else. A consequence of this perspective is that the supernatural, in the sense of magic, is treated as an instrument<sup>31</sup>.

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asp (21.2.2023); R. Cipriani, *Diffused Religion: Beyond Secularization*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2007, pp. 111, 138, 140.

30. St. Papalexandropoulos, «Νέα Έποχή: Ή θρησκευολογική ταυτότητα ενός κινήματος», (δεύτερο μέρος), *Έξοδος/Exodos* 7 (1992), pp. 41-61, 50-51; *idem*, «Οί Νέες Θρησκείες: Ίστορική έπισκόπηση και συστηματική θεώρηση», *op.cit.*, pp. 168-169; W. J. Hanhgraaff, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian’s Perspective”, *Social Compass* 46, 2 (1999), pp. 145-160, 146, <https://scp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/46/2/145> [20.2.2023]; P. B. Clarke, “Healing”, in: *idem* (ed.), *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 255-260, 255, 257.

31. Io. Xidakis, *Τò Καλό και τò Κακό στòν Κόσμο τών Βιντεοπαιχνιδιών: Θρησκευολογική*

The pattern of confining the divine within the material world can be seen in several neomythological products, such as superhero comic books and science fiction films. But since our research focuses on the world of video games, from this point forward, we shall cite examples drawn from the plots of these particular neomythological products.

So, we can see this kind of inner-world god within the virtual reality of *The Outer Worlds* (Obsidian Entertainment – Private Division, 2019). In this action-adventure game<sup>32</sup>, the main character is a member of a ship that transports colonists to an alien world. In the virtual universe, i.e. in a supposed world of the 29th century, two socio-political groups, the Scientists and the Philosophists<sup>33</sup>, dominate, but they also function as religions. What they have in common, however, is that both groups develop a religious discourse while trying to solve everyday problems, as evidenced by the missions they assign to the protagonist. That is, along with their political and social activity, they teach about a divine being, which is located in a higher sphere of existence, but always within the material world, and whose existence even justifies any decision or action they make.

For the Scientists in particular, this being is identified with the Universe, which in turn is defined as the “Grand Architect”. In this capacity the Universe is a perfectly rational being, independent of the everyday life of men and as a transcendent mechanism it reveals its purpose to all who adopt mathematical logic. For the Philosophists, the Universe is identified with the “Eternal Truth”, that is, with an impersonal entity characterized by simplicity and harmony. By its existence this entity directs beings to the so-called “Awakening”, which is defined as an automatic understanding of the divine being. This cognitive state comes

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Μελέτη, PhD thesis, Athens 2018, pp. 315-316, <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/43668> [21.2.2023].

32. In order to have the safest view of video game plots, we use the Wikia and Wikipedia sites, where the international community of gamers has anonymously, but with constant updating, offered their full scenarios. Of course, where the secondary literature sheds more light on some of the parameters of the scenarios, a comparison has been made between these reports and those of the aforementioned websites.

33. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “The Outer Worlds”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Outer\\_Worlds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Outer_Worlds) [21.2.2023].

about, on the one hand, through the denial of the social way of life and, on the other, through a variety of experiences, either positive, such as entering into a relationship, or negative, such as losing a loved one. So as can be seen from the description of the teachings of the two groups, Scientists and Philosophists identify god with the Universe. It is noteworthy that they both recognize the Universe as an impersonal entity, although they attribute personal characteristics to it, such as the projection of a purpose, its association with mortal beings, and its comprehensibility.

Based on this pattern of the inner-world absolute, the image of the supernatural hero is then projected, who, having recognized and accepted the divine element within the world and its aspects, will accelerate change: he is going to bring about a new social, technological, planetary, ecological future for his world<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, along with the chosen hero motif, there is also the vision of another world, of a new space and time, of a new historical period<sup>35</sup>.

The history of civilization, the mythology of the past and religious teachings are exploited in a new way each time within the field of neo-mythology, which is characterized by its many perspectives<sup>36</sup>. To put it another way, everything is determined from the beginning and adapted according to the plot of the current mythological product. Thus, history as a sequence of events and with all that it contains, i.e. the whole of myths, legends and traditions, becomes the material to tell another, alternative side of it, to reveal through it a different history of mankind.

We mentioned *The Outer Worlds* earlier. According to its plot, the reality described and depicted in the game has historically arisen as a consequence of another version of the 20th century and more specifically as a result of an alternative American history of the 1930s and 1940s. Also, in the

34. Io. Xidakis, *Οί Περί ΑΤΙΑ Θρησκείες*, unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Athens 2006, p. 8, <https://independent.academia.edu/IOANNISXIDAKIS> [21.2.2023]; *idem*, *Τò Καλò και τò Καχò στòν Κòσμο τών Βιντεοπαιχνιδιών...*, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

35. St. Papalexandropoulos, «Νέα Έποχή: Ή θρησκευολογική ταυτότητα ένòς κινήματος», (πρώτο μέρος), *Έξοδος/Exodos* 6 (1991), pp. 17-29, 18-19.

36. Hexham & Poewe, *op.cit.*, pp., 94, 95, 150, 153; D. E. Cowan & D. G. Bromley, *Cults and new religions: a brief history*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Chichester 2015, p. 9; Xidakis, *Οί Περί ΑΤΙΑ Θρησκείες*, *op.cit.*, pp. 19, 21, 27, 36, 42, 53-54, 59-60, 78-89.

video game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017) an alternative course of the 21<sup>st</sup> century leads mankind to the brink of destruction. In it, terms such as “Gaia”, “Apollo”, “Hades”, “Hephaestus” are understood not in their original meaning and certainly not as elements of traditional religiosity and mythology, but as names of computer programs<sup>37</sup>.

The creation of a new version of history and the redefinition of elements of religion and culture are characteristic and structural motifs of neomythology. This attempt to place everything in a new context is not limited to elements of space and time, but extends to the very identity of the human being, or at least to how this identity is defined.

Testament as a character in the game *Guilty Gear* (Arc System Works, 1998) is a typical example of neomythology’s tendency to “play” with terms and contents. This entity is identified by the game’s scenario sometimes as male and sometimes as female. It is anthropomorphous although it does not belong to the human species. It’s a creation of technology, but also of a different kind of secret, magical knowledge<sup>38</sup>. Conversely, in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, we see zoomorphic beings being labelled “persons” and belonging to races similar to those of humans<sup>39</sup>. In *Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies* (Square, Nintendo 2009) we see divine beings and angelic beings appear as typical human beings<sup>40</sup>.

It is precisely in this context of reinterpreting elements of religion, history, and culture in general that video games exploit, as we shall see, the space that they themselves separate from the rest of their digital reality and recognize as “sacred”.

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37. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Horizon: Zero Dawn”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon\\_Zero\\_Dawn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon_Zero_Dawn) [22.2.2023].

38. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Guilty Gear (video game)”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilty\\_Gear\\_\(video\\_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilty_Gear_(video_game)) [22.2.2023].

39. “Final Fantasy Tactics Advance”, Square, Nintendo, 2003, pp. 31-32.

40. *Fandom*, s.v. “Celestrian”, n.d., <https://dragonquest.fandom.com/wiki/Celestrian> [22.2.2023].

## Video games and neomythology

Video games, as part of popular culture, are the most contemporary and popular expression of neomythology. Video games are a dynamic cultural product that is constantly being renewed<sup>41</sup>. Although they have been around since the early 1970s<sup>42</sup>, when the first action-adventure games appeared (*Computer Space* in 1971, *Colossal Cave Adventure* and *Hunt the Wumpus* in 1972), they are a product that is constantly undergoing changes ranging from what it presents on the screen to how its protagonist appears.

A video game has the characteristics of a traditional game, namely, player or players, rules, the outcome of winning or losing, a mechanism that counts when someone wins or loses, the element of fun. At the same time, however, as a contemporary product, it needs technology, i.e., a computer which may be of a special type (game machine – console) or conventional<sup>43</sup>.

Based on its technological structure and the background of its scenario, it creates on-screen interactive and simulated worlds. These worlds may be abstract (e.g. a dot moving in a maze), as in the classic game *Pac-Man* (Namco, Midway, 1980), or, and this is the most common today, universes featuring virtual characters, who may have complex roles, peculiar behavior, special purposes. It is precisely these structural characteristics of a video game, namely the interactivity or interaction with a virtual environment and the simulation of reality, that reinforce, as we shall see, its identity as a neomythological product.

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41. P. Zackariasson & M. Dymek, *Video Game Marketing: A Student Textbook*, Routledge, London 2017, p. 14; Al. Styhre, *Indie Video Game Development Work: Innovation in the Creative Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, p. 13.

42. Tr. Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games*, Yellow Ant, East Sussex 2010, pp. 10-11, 51; Van Burnham, *Supercade: a visual history of the videogame age 1971-1984*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 71-72.

43. N. Esposito, "A Short and Simple Definition of What a Videogame Is", *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views-Worlds in Play*, Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA, 2005, pp. 1-6, 2, <https://digra.org> [23.2.2023]; P. E. Rauch, *Playing with Good and Evil: Videogames and Moral Philosophy*, MIT, Cambridge 2007, p. 20; Andr. Jahn-Sudmann & R. Stockmann, *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon: Games Without Frontiers War Without Tears*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, p. 3.

A video game is presented and described as interactive. This means that starting and continuing it requires the player to participate in the unfolding of the story, the pursuit of goals and the acceptance of challenges<sup>44</sup>. Each time it starts up, the player is asked to quickly respond and control on-screen a digital subject within a fictional space: in action games a fighting hero, in strategy games a people and an army, and in adventure and role-playing games a hero or a company of heroes searching for something (e.g. a treasure, a princess, an ancient secret). In fact, according to Chris Crawford, a programmer, designer and scholar, the whole interactive process of obstacles, goals, their fulfillment, which is accompanied by a constant state of conflict between the hero and their environment, is the main structural element of a video game<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, everything in video games is presented in such a way as to combine imagination with logic. Video games present a world of imagination but also coherence, a reality that has its own peculiar phenomena but also pre-established rules, that is, a space which is both unfamiliar and familiar. This improbable and at the same time possible reality is, in effect, a myth. However, in the context of a video game and in the language of its creators and researchers, this process of creating a believable fantasy and a rationalized mythology, or, conversely, a fictional reality, is called “simulation”. Scholars agree that video games as a product of simulation create something that resembles reality as we know it, but at the same time is not it; something, therefore, incredible but always coherent, which the player is invited to enter and experience<sup>46</sup>.

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44. P. Jagoda, “On Difficulty in Video Games: Mechanics, Interpretation, Affect”, *Critical Inquiry* 45, 1 (2018), pp. 199-233, 201 <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/action/doSearch?AllField=On+Difficulty+in+Video+Games%3A+Mechanics%2C+Interpretation%2C+Affect> [24.2.2023]; K. Salen & Er. Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2004, chap. 26, p. 2; Ut. Ritterfeld & R. Weber, “Video Games for Entertainment and Education”, in: P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (eds.), *Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses, and Consequences*, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 399-413, 401.

45. Chr. Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design*, (place and editor not mentioned) 1982, p. 13; I. Bogost, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 134; Salen & Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, chap. 7, pp. 7, 8.

46. R. Klevjer, *What is the Avatar? Fiction and Embodiment in Avatar-Based Singleplayer Computer Games*, University of Bergen, Bergen 2006, pp. 16, 39, 40, 111; Salen & Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, chap. 27, pp. 2, 38; L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT

It is no coincidence that scholars and players often use the term “avatar” to describe the combination of player and virtual character. The term “avatar” comes from Indian mythology. In Sanskrit it means the descent of a god to earth and his incarnation into another god who is the new form of the first<sup>47</sup>. In video games, the term “avatar” refers to the action of the player, who descends into the virtual fantasy world, and characterizes the hero who is now the digital form of the former. The new persona formed is that of the player/hero and has something of both in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

Erik Davis describes him as the player’s virtual twin and as his shadow self, who embodies his perspective and represents him within the game<sup>48</sup>. A similar view is held by Bob Rehak, who talks about the inhabited avatar whose perception coincides with the player’s perspective<sup>49</sup>. It is thus transformed into a new character that becomes the reflection of its operator, the living imitation of his individuality and the representative of his own agency in a new world, in virtual reality<sup>50</sup>.

In this reality video games do not simply use symbols known from the traditions of religions and from the previous mythological wealth without first modifying the elements they take. This is not a repetition of elements of classical theology and mythology, but a new mythology, as described above.

For example, in the game *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames, Sega, 2009, 2018) the protagonist is a supernatural being who fights angels when they invade human reality. Bayonetta and her enemies use weapons, machines, and various other technological tools. Through them they kill

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Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 42.

47. D. Kinsley, “Avatāra”, in: L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, Thomson Gale, New York 2005, pp. 707-708, 707; St. Papalexandropoulos, *Ανατολικές Θρησκείες*, Gutenberg, Athens 2016, pp. 234, 235.

48. Er. Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, (place not mentioned) 5-Star, 2004, p. 261.

49. B. Rehak, “Genre Profile: First-Person Shooting Games”, in: M. J. P. Wolf (ed.), *The Video Game Explosion: A history from Pong to Playstation and Beyond*, Greenwood Press, Westport 2008, pp. 187-195, 191.

50. *Idem*, “Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar”, in: M. J. P. Wolf & B. Perron (eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader*, Routledge, New York 2003, pp. 103-128, 106, 107, 108, 109, 112.

and are killed, but they also gain entry into other dimensions of reality, such as Paradiso, Inferno and Purgatorio. This form of technology is fully justified by the logic of the virtual world, that is, it is presented in a secularized way, just like the typical religious spaces of Hell or Heaven. However, it does not differ from traditional magic in its manner of manifestation and its effects. Within *Bayonetta* magic and technology are two sides of the same coin, magical technology or scientific magic<sup>51</sup>.

Therefore, what is mentioned in *Bayonetta* can be categorized according to the motifs of diffused religiosity, and specifically according to those of neomythology. This is precisely what leads us to conclude that, despite their differences from a science fiction film or the worldview of a devotee of diffused religiosity, video games are clearly products of neomythology. They repeat themes known from neomythology. This repetition has to do not only with peripheral, secondary parts of their scenario, but also with the way they present the sacred space and intergrade it into their plots.

### Sacred space in video game neomythology

The game *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo, 2017) combines elements of action and adventure. At the beginning of the game the camera focuses on the hero, Link, who seems to be gradually regaining consciousness; he hears a woman's voice calling him to wake up; he obeys her call, and manages to free himself from the machine in which he was placed. From that moment on, the camera follows him from the perspective of a third person, that is, the player uses the hero as if he were a vehicle and with it he moves and explores the virtual space. Link heads for the center of the room surrounding the machine. The game informs the player/hero that the room is called Slumber of Restoration. From the name, the player can deduce that this machine, which Link was in a moment ago, served to resuscitate him; so it was some kind of medical equipment.

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51. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Bayonetta", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayonetta\\_\(video\\_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayonetta_(video_game)) [25.2.2023].



With the help of luminous signs Link locates Sheikah Slate's room. It's a high-tech device that looks like a tablet and contains information about him, about the kingdom of Hyrule, i.e., his virtual reality, but also about his mission.

A door that opens and closes automatically leads him to a second room similar in aesthetics to the first. In this room also the presence of technology is very strong. The room is lit by blue lamps. Here the hero acquires, by opening two wooden chests, his first equipment, that is, his first clothes which also function as defensive objects in the event of a battle. The tablet he had just found is not just an information device: through Slate the hero can control his equipment by choosing clothes or even weapons that help him become stronger.

Link sees the main gate of the building across from the door connecting the two rooms. To open it, he must place the tablet in the corresponding predetermined frame next to the gate. The gate opens. The hero hears the woman's voice telling him, "You are the light, our light that must shine upon Hyrule once again". Immediately afterwards he is given the opportunity to exit the building. The tablet informs him of the place he was just a moment ago. It's the Shrine of Regeneration.

Outside the Shrine of Regeneration, Link has a panoramic view of the kingdom of Hyrule, as the shrine is built on a hill. To his right and a short distance from the Shrine, he also spots the Temple of Time, a structure known from other games in the *Legend of Zelda* series. Also, at a short distance from the Shrine of Regeneration, effectively within the confines of the shrine, he acquires his first weapon, but also fights his first battle against a Bokoblin, a common monstrous creature of the Hyrule ecosystem<sup>52</sup>.

In other words, outside the temple the hero resorts to violence, to conflict. This act of aggression, extermination, subjugation of the other, and destruction in general, is justified by the entire system of the video game, by the mechanism of the gameplay, and by the scenario. This is a familiar motif in the world of video games, the motif of justifying evil

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52. See also *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Legend\\_of\\_Zelda:\\_Breath\\_of\\_the\\_Wild](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda:_Breath_of_the_Wild) [27.2.2023].

displayed by both good and bad, both hero and antagonist<sup>53</sup>. Precisely because it is one of the structural and recurring themes of video games, it is linked to the virtual sacred space several times, as we'll see in the examples below.

Based on the opening scene of the video game, we can see that in *Breath of the Wild* the Shrine of Regeneration, that is, the sacred space through which the hero enters his virtual world: a. is presented as the abode of supernatural beings, as evidenced by the role of the female entity who awakens and guides Link (in the game's plot it turns out to be Zelda, a mythical princess of Hyrule), but also by the position of the hero himself, who according to the female voice is the chosen one, the savior of the kingdom, b. is the seat of the hero, c. constitutes the initial place in which he is informed for the first time of the general context of his mission, d. constitutes the space that equips him, e. provides new technologies and new magical tools, but also f. is a dangerous place for the hero as evidenced by the first battles that Link has to fight against his first enemies just outside the shrine.

The main characteristic features of the Shrine of Regeneration as a sacred space are, in general, a typical example of the repetitive way in which each such space is captured and, consequently, understood within the world of video games.

For example, in older and newer games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons: Warriors of the Eternal Sun* (Westwood Associates, 1992), *EverQuest II* (Daybreak Game Company, Ubisoft, 2004) and *Skyrim* (Bethesda Softworks, Take-Two Interactive, 2K Games, 2011-2022), various temples are mentioned. In *Warriors of the Eternal Sun*, the Azcan Temple<sup>54</sup> is featured, in *EverQuest II*, the Temple of Life<sup>55</sup>, in *Skyrim*, the Temple of

53. Xidakis, *Tò Kalò kai tò Kakò stòn Kósmo tῶn Bιντεοπαιχνιδιῶν...*, op.cit., pp. 134-137.

54. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Dungeons & Dragons: Warriors of the Eternal Sun", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons\\_%26\\_Dragons:\\_Warriors\\_of\\_the\\_Eternal\\_Sun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dungeons_%26_Dragons:_Warriors_of_the_Eternal_Sun) [27.2.2023]; "Dungeons & Dragons: Warriors of the Eternal Sun Wiki Guide", [https://www.ign.com/wikis/dungeons-dragons-warriors-of-the-eternal-sun/Walkthrough\\_-\\_Perfect\\_Game](https://www.ign.com/wikis/dungeons-dragons-warriors-of-the-eternal-sun/Walkthrough_-_Perfect_Game) [27.2.2023].

55. *Fandom*, s.v. "The Temple of Life", n.d., [https://eq2.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Temple\\_of\\_Life](https://eq2.fandom.com/wiki/The_Temple_of_Life) [27.2.2023]; William Sims Bainbridge, *eGods: Faith versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 145.

the Divines<sup>56</sup>. In these games the temple has features similar to those of the Shrine of Regeneration. It is noteworthy that the temple is often associated with a particular religion, at least according to the scenarios of these games. The connection of religion and temple is external and limited to the way the temple is described in these scenarios. But the temple, as depicted in these digital worlds, clearly exists only as a building. It is not the center of a living religious community. It relates to a god, goddess, or gods and is associated with religion and community. This connection, however, remains superficial and confined to the plot, since in its essence, in the details that the gameplay reveals, the temple does not function in the context of an active community of believers or as the place where the faithful show their devotion and develop through ritual acts their worship of these deities.

In these examples and their counterparts, the temple is in each case the place where the hero undertakes new quests, heals from the wounds that may have been caused by his previous adventures, acquires new items, supplies and possibly new weapons. In a temple he may also find and include in his team a priest, since the priest is a character with certain qualities, as is, for example, the warrior or the wizard. Inside the temple and having completed specific missions, the hero may also increase statistical indicators, such as the indicator of his reputation and acceptance by the virtual people (for example, the corresponding indicator in *EverQuest II* is called “Faction”<sup>57</sup>), in order to end his adventure more easily.

The temple retains, of course, a traditional feature, but it fits the needs of the plot and the mechanism of the game. It is the architecture of virtual temples and the attempt to capture as monumental buildings that stand out from the rest in terms of architectural rhythm, size and aesthetics. As we said before, this element serves the mechanism of the game and is repeated not only for the sake of imitating tradition but also for practical reasons: the sacred buildings stand out from the rest and so any virtual character can easily identify them within a virtual

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56. *Fandom*, s.v. “Temple of the Divines (Skyrim)”, n.d., [https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/Temple\\_of\\_the\\_Divines\\_\(Skyrim\)#Quests](https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/Temple_of_the_Divines_(Skyrim)#Quests) [27.2.2023].

57. *Fandom*, s.v. “Faction”, n.d., <https://eq2.fandom.com/wiki/Faction> [2.3.2023].

city; this recognition of the sacred buildings facilitates the plot and the completion of the hero's adventure.

In this way, in *Skyrim*'s largest city, Solitude, the Temple of the Divines dominates its east with its size, decoration and luxury. Thus, the player/hero can easily find it and realize that it is indeed an important place in Solitude, therefore equally important to the development of the plot. Having identified the temple, he will explore the area around it. He will also be able to enter the temple as part of a predetermined mission<sup>58</sup>, having previously received permission from a high priest. Inside the temple he will be able to collect valuable objects, which will help him in his next missions<sup>59</sup>.

Therefore, the player/hero locates the temple and utilizes the sacred space in order to move further into the story of *Skyrim*. Interestingly, though, if he pays attention, he will see on the west side of the city another structure, which stands out from the surrounding buildings, although it is smaller in size than the temple. By talking to virtual characters or consulting the map provided by the game, the hero learns that he is in front of the building of the Solitude Mages Guild. In essence, the place functions as a wizards' college, as their training center. For the player/hero, recognizing the place has the same effect as the temple: it will lead to meeting new virtual characters, thus taking on newer missions and acquiring more powerful objects<sup>60</sup>.

The pattern that is formed, at least on the basis of the gameplay, i.e., the hero's interaction with the sacred space –the temple or the mages guild– as both, in any case, remain not everyday places, is the following: the sacred space, although it may be externally recognized or even titled as such, ultimately emerges as something else, as a means that exists for a purpose, and more specifically as an “arena” that exists to support the central character and the development of the plot, that is, practical, in any case, purposes.

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58. This is the mission “The Wolf Queen Awakened”.

59. *Fandom*, s.v. “The Wolf Queen Awakened”, n.d., [https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Wolf\\_Queen\\_Awakened](https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/The_Wolf_Queen_Awakened) [2.3.2023].

60. *Fandom*, s.v. “Solitude Mages Guild”, n.d., [https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/Solitude\\_Mages\\_Guild](https://elderscrolls.fandom.com/wiki/Solitude_Mages_Guild) [2.3.2023].

Solitude's sacred spaces display patterns similar to those of the Shrine of Resurrection: through them, the digital characters discover new objects, weapons, acquire new magical properties, meet allies or fight new enemies.

At this point we would like to analyze four interesting motifs, the content of which we have observed to some extent in the case of *Breath of the Wild* and *Skyrim*. However, their mention is deemed necessary precisely because they are repeated in almost all video games and specifically in role-playing and adventure games:

*Firstly*, the role of priests and wizards, whom the hero of the video games meets, is similar. Of course, there may be differences between the two, but in general, in the various digital environments of video games, wizards and priests act like warriors, that is, their action is explainable and produces tangible results. In the case of role-playing games and adventure games in particular, the rule is that the priest heals the virtual people while the wizard destroys them; this, of course, does not mean that the priest does not fight his opponents or that the wizard does not heal the wounds of his companions with spells. This, after all, the reason why the two of them are often included in the class of healers<sup>61</sup>. Thus, we see in *EverQuest I* and *II* classes of healers consisting of priests, clerics, and even mages and wizards. All these healers use strengthening spells, which are called buff spells<sup>62</sup>. In *World of Warcraft* both priests and wizards heal; the difference between them lies mainly in the source from which they draw their power<sup>63</sup>. In *Final Fantasy* games, healers are called White Mages and they act as the priest of other games of this genre; that is, they are always good, healing and empowering the

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61. Xidakis, *Tò Kalò kai tò Kakò stòn Kósmo τῶν Βιντεοπαιχνιδιῶν...*, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

62. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "EverQuest", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EverQuest> [3.3.2023]; *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "EverQuest II", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EverQuest\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EverQuest_II) [3.3.2023]; Bainbridge, *op.cit.*, p.110; Sc. Rogers, *Level Up!: The Guide to Great Video Game Design*, Wiley, Chichester 2010, p. 302; T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 35.

63. "World of Warcraft: Classes", <https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-us/game/classes> (3.3.2023); Bainbridge, *op.cit.*, pp. 167, 179; *idem, Online Multiplayer Games-Synthesis Lectures on Information Concepts, Retrieval, and Services, Lecture #13*, Morgan & Claypool, 2010, p. 63.

characters<sup>64</sup>. Also, as indicated by the term “sage”, which in role-playing and adventure games denotes a wizard-priest, representatives of both religion and magic appear on screen to wield supernatural powers, that is, to resort to supernatural means to provide solutions to various practical issues that arise in the course of the virtual adventure<sup>65</sup>.

*Secondly*, the theme of linking the sacred place with the service of practical purposes is reiterated, just as in the case of these digital priests. That’s why in the Tomb Raider action-adventure games, religious sites act as pretend spaces and exist only for discovering magical objects and weapons. In fact, as further evidence of the motif of justifying evil, the protagonist Lara Croft can destroy centuries-old temples and palaces for the purpose of finding and removing valuable monumental artefacts from their surroundings in order to complete her missions<sup>66</sup>.

*Thirdly*, in video games, and especially in those featuring the adventures of virtual characters, the sacred space defines the virtual reality and, as in traditional myths, acquires cosmological significance. The sacred space is a landmark of the virtual environment; but also the virtual environment itself is defined several times as the space that exists between the various temples or altars of a particular virtual reality. A typical example is *Secret of Mana* (Square, 1993), in which the entire virtual country is defined by the eight Mana Temples<sup>67</sup>.

Fourthly, there is a repeated attempt to associate the existence of the sacred space with the possibility of evil, with something potentially threatening. This motif is somewhat reminiscent of the traditional motif of the dual nature of the sacred, but has been modified according to the requirements of neomythology, as will be seen in the following examples.

In the role-playing game *Golden Sun* (Camelot Software Planning, Nintendo, 2001) the temple is at the center of the conflict between good

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64. *Fandom*, s.v. “White Mage”, n.d., [https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/White\\_Mage](https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/White_Mage) [3.3.2023].

65. Xidakis, *Τὸ Καλὸ καὶ τὸ Κακὸ στὸν Κόσμο τῶν Βιντεοπαιχνιδιῶν...*, op.cit., p. 276.

66. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Tomb Raider”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb\\_Raider](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_Raider) [3.3.2023].

67. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Secret of Mana”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret\\_of\\_Mana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_of_Mana) [4.3.2023].

and evil, between heroes and their enemies. According to the plot, the heroes must clash with their enemies to control the five sacred centers, namely the four Elemental Lighthouses and the shrine of Mt. Aleph<sup>68</sup>.

This setting, that is, the theme of the connection of the sacred space with evil, does not arise by chance, but is repeated in several games of the genre. In fact, many times the temple, as the abode of a god, as a place dedicated to them or as a geographical point that stands out from the city and its rhythms, is close to evil or belongs exclusively to it. This means that the sacred space in the form of a temple or a monastery is either placed near the den of evil or presented as the temple of an evil god or as the seat of an evil priest.

In the role-playing games *The Bard's Tale* (Tales of the Unknown: Volume I) (Interplay Production, Electronic Arts, 1985) and *Resonance of Fate* (tri-Ace, Sega, 2010) the temple referred to in their plots belongs to evil. In the first game, the temple is the seat of Mad God, the main opponent of the heroic company<sup>69</sup>.

The second, *Resonance of Fate*, describes a future in which, in order to survive a pandemic, people have been forced to lock themselves inside the walls of a technological city, Basel, and be physically joint to the Zenith System, i.e. a computer system. The leaders of this community are called Cardinals and are the priests of the "religion of the Zenith". The main characters of the game revolt against the theocracy imposed by the Cardinals, turn against the central cardinal, Cardinal Rowen, and confront him in the Basilica, a temple that is the religious and administrative center of the technological city<sup>70</sup>.

In strategy games, too, we find a sacred space, intended to offer both good and bad tools, weapons, objects and, in any case, the chance to defeat their opponents. In these games, we see another characteristic feature, which is present in the previous games, but not with the same intensity. It is the association of the sacred space with hyper-technology.

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68. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Golden Sun", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Sun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Sun) [4.3.2023]; "Golden Sun-manual", Nintendo, 2001, pp. 6-7.

69. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "The Bard's Tale", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bard%27s\\_Tale\\_\(1985\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bard%27s_Tale_(1985)) [6.3.2023].

70. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Resonance of Fate", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resonance\\_of\\_Fate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resonance_of_Fate) [6.3.2023].

By hyper-technology we define the non-real but nevertheless believable version of technology which, because of its capabilities and privileged characteristics, can offer spectacular and automatic solutions to multiple problems. To put it another way, it's a magical technology, or it is technology that within the virtual world is identical to the concept of traditional magic.

Games such as *Anno 1701*, *Civilization*, and others use the sacred space, through the construction of temples, altars, monasteries, as a necessary condition for ensuring a victorious outcome. In this way, in *Anno 1701* (Sunflowers Interactive, 2006), the player/governor seeks to build churches, while also taking care to construct various fortification, residences, camps. In order to achieve victory, he both advances technology by inventing weapons and tools and supports religion through taxes and temples. Religion, and especially the sacred space, becomes yet another tool, and precisely the most important one for completing the successful gameplay<sup>71</sup>.

Similarly in *Civilization* (Sid Meier, Bruce Shelley, 1991-2022), the player/general increases his power and can achieve victory faster if he orders his subjects to build the World Wonders or Seven Wonders in honor of his empire, as well as temples in his honor<sup>72</sup>.

The scenario of *Rome: Total War* (Sega, 2004) includes the sacred space and together with the gameplay defines its setting: the sacred space, as a space dedicated to a deity, produces tangible effects, since it strengthens the empire financially through its very existence. In particular, each time the Roman army, commanded by the player, conquers an enemy city, it, first of all, takes care to demolish the old temples and erect new ones. It thus achieves full compliance of the natives and consequently their economic exploitation in the best possible way<sup>73</sup>. In *Rome Total War*:

71. "1701 A.D.-Guide and Walkthrough", <https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/pc/932832-1701-ad/faqs/47520> [8.3.2023].

72. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Civilization (video game)", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization\\_\(video\\_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization_(video_game)) [8.3.2023]; P. Kuittinen, *Very Important Game People in the History of Computer and Video Games*, University of Art and Design, Helsinki (year not mentioned), p. 103; D. Myers, *Play redux: the form of computer games*, University of Michigan, 2010, pp. 100-103.

73. Bainbridge, *op.cit.*, p. 9; Kate Berens & G. Howard, *The Rough Guide to Videogames*,



*Barbarian Invasion* (2005), the subjugation of the barbarians is ensured by the total destruction of their homes, but mainly by the destruction of their places of worship<sup>74</sup>. So the sacred space here is the means that the player has to ensure that his victory on the battlefield will be certain, that the vanquished will remain subservient.

In *Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends* (Big Huge Games, 2006) and *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* (Ensemble Studios, Microsoft, 1999), the sacred space not only empowers the player/hero, but also functions in a completely naturalistic way, i.e. it appears as a production space for hyper-technological creations. In the first game, the hostile Cuotl use on the battlefield warriors, wizards, gods (the Sun God, God of Death, Goddess of Storm) and produce battle chariots in their temples. In other words, their temples are also factories<sup>75</sup>. In *The Age of Kings*, we see similar elements of promoting and exploiting the sacred space: a. temples produce warrior monks, that is, they are the places of creation of such military units; b. monumental buildings (Wonders) and shrines of imposing dimensions cause awe and tendencies of foreign peoples to join the player's empire; c. sacred relics are kept in monasteries making the empire rich, more able to accumulate gold<sup>76</sup>.

Therefore, there are spaces within video games that can be named, identified, and displayed as sacred. At the same time, however, it is clear that they have undergone a radical change in relation to their traditional significance. Although they may appear in the form of separate buildings,

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Rough Guides, London 2008, pp. 171-173; Ow. Bennallack, "Rome: Total War", in: Mott (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 584.

74. J. Cogburn & M. Silcox, *Philosophy Through Video Games*, Routledge, New York 2009, p.88.

75. "Rise of Legends Heaven", <https://rol.heavengames.com/php/gameinfo/units/?tribe=2&cat> [9.3.2023]; *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise\\_of\\_Nations:\\_Rise\\_of\\_Legends](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise_of_Nations:_Rise_of_Legends) [9.3.2023]; D. Harris, "Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends", in: Mott (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 690.

76. "Age of Empires II-manual", Ensemble Studios, Microsoft, 1999; for the plot see pp. 9, 16-18, 31-32, for the temples see p. 53, for the monks see p. 88. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age\\_of\\_Empires\\_II:\\_The\\_Age\\_of\\_Kings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Empires_II:_The_Age_of_Kings) [9.3.2023]; M. Pritchard, "Ensemble Studios' Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings", in: Grossman (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 115-126; D. McCarthy, "Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings", in: Mott (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 381.

delimit their virtual environment, and be associated with a settlement or religion, they function more as one of the means the game provides the player in order to complete it, to achieve victory, to destroy the opposing army or to protect their heroes.

## Conclusions

Video games are not simple games and they are not just games. They are modern technological products, which, unlike any other game, depend for their operation on their digital mechanism and plot. At the same time, however, they are not just games, in the sense that they are the virtual environment for the projection, development and reinforcement of elements that were once seen exclusively as content of mythological and religious traditions of the past.

In this way, everything we know from the realm of mythology and religion is reused in the plots of the video games. It becomes material for telling a new myth. In fact, the way the mythological material is used and the motifs that emerge through the production of the new myth prove that all of this is not accidental. This production of mythical elements, and especially the way in which the mythical elements are combined and projected, refers us to the broader field of neomythology and the context in which it belongs, namely diffused religiosity.

Within the neomythological world of video games, words such as “temple”, “god”, “sacred”, but also images of various sacred buildings, externally refer to their origins, at least in the way they are used, but their conceptual content is replaced by another. In each case, they are formulated from the beginning and placed in another mythological context, in which we find four dominant motifs:

*Firstly*, sacred spaces exist within the virtual reality. The game’s graphics depict temples and sacred centers within the virtual environment. On the other hand, the plot links sacred places to the fate of a city, to the religion of a community, to the presence of a supernatural being.

*Secondly*, the buildings, which are characterized as “sacred” by the games’ plot and differ in their shape and image from any other virtual

space, have at the same time different properties and different roles. That is, within them the player will acquire and achieve something that they can't in any other building, and certainly not to the same degree.

*Thirdly*, based on the two preceding motifs, that is, how the plot, the graphics and the mechanism project the sacred spaces, we can confirm that precisely these different properties of them are not transcendently understood and are not approached according to their traditional religious significance. Sacred spaces are not associated with a god, who is above and beyond everyday life, nor are they active centers of community life and tradition.

*Fourthly*, based on the internal logic of the game, the way they are designed and the players' own perception of them, sacred spaces are perceived similarly to the way the divine itself can be recognized within the virtual world.

Especially in terms of the projection of the divine, we see gods, heroes, angels, demons, wizards and hyper-technologists being portrayed within video games as natural or rather supernatural beings, who differ in abilities from the common man. At the same time, they are not transcendent in the sense of being completely different. This means that the powers of these beings, their magical and hyper-technological manifestations, can be explained, so they can happen. Thus the beings themselves, as long as they are considered explicable, can function as means, as "tangible tools", which the player/hero will use against the virtual enemy.

In the same way, the sacred spaces associated with these beings are those geographical points on the virtual map where the hero or heroes will find support, upgrades to their abilities, new weaponry, new supplies, new powers, new companions, new missions, or, conversely, the points from which the villain of the plot will attack the good. In other words, they are powerful centers that facilitate or hinder in particular ways the virtual characters, both good and bad, during their adventure. In the context of a digital mythology, therefore, a variety of sacred spaces exist, but they are almost mutated in their original meaning, since they have been adapted to the purpose and algorithmic logic of video games. Within the believable and possible worlds that they create, sacred spaces

help to end their play, but most importantly they enhance the expression and reproduction of the new myths of the diffused new religiosity.