The pervasiveness of neoliberalism in the representations of precarious work of the game Death Stranding[1]

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Abstract

One of the most expected games of the last generation of consoles was Death Stranding (2019), especially due to the fame of its director, Hideo Kojima, and also to the innovative game mechanics that were demonstrated from press releases and videos of its makers disclosure. In this article, we detain to observe the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in game design elements, mechanics and narrative plot of the game in question, above all concerned with the reason of the precariousness of work. For this, we count on the theories of work (Antunes, 1999), platform work (Srnicek, 2017; Slee, 2017; Sundararajan, 2016) and neoliberalism (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Foucault, 2008; Harvey, 2008) to base our critical game analytics based on systems observation (Luhmann, 2000).

Keywords

Introduction

The word business, according to Ricardo Antunes (2005), means "denying idleness", an expression of extreme repulsion to moments of rest or contemplative laziness. We have never been so committed to denying idleness as we are now, but if it were possible, we would run away from work as if we were running away from a plague, Marx has already said. Video games are exemplary products of the cultural industry that aim to escape from business, from work, at least apparently, because a certain capitalist rationality has been hanging around these products. In this article, we focus on observing the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in game design elements, mechanics and narrative plot of the game Death Stranding (2019), mainly concerned with the reason for the precariousness of work.

One of the most expected games of the last generation of consoles was Death Stranding, mainly due to the fame of its director, Hideo Kojima, and the innovative game mechanics that were demonstrated in press releases and promotional videos of its makers. This, of course, was a construction from the hype process, that is, players started to overestimate the title due to anxiety about the release of the game.

The game's opening images acclimate us in a post-apocalyptic scenery, highlighting immense open landscapes, canyons, deserted mountains, between which a kind of human return to the state of nature is visually insinuated. In the open and desolate space, a man on his fast motorcycle speeds up, carrying a few order suitcases on his back. He stops and watches the flock of birds that flee from what now appears as acid rain, resuming the race to, shortly thereafter, suffer a fall and lose his bike. In the face of the catastrophic circumstances presented in the first cutscenes of the plot, here's the reason with which is justified the experience of living a delivery avatar in the game.

The social isolation presented by the introduction of the protagonist in the game ends up approaching the aesthetics closer to our social-historical context, whether it is the pandemic resulting from the covid-19. That virtual world, however, is curiously bucolic, frugal, of contemplation, in detriment of the expected ambience to serve as a backdrop to a typical representative of structural unemployment, or better, the urban environment, full of buildings and avid passersby for consumption. Quite the opposite: the valleys, prairies and the unusually immense canyons make us believe that we are facing a kind of desert of social life, or who knows, a representation of what Jean Baudrillard (1991) classified as "the desert of the real".[1]

It matters much more to the avatar, far from the old imperatives of narrative progression linked to power ups, or punctuations perpetrated through sensory-motor reactions governed by playfulness, appeal to the rescue and conservation of material objects of everyday social life (some items ordered by someone of that/of this same world). We realized from the beginning the compulsory condition of speed; of a dromological regime (Virilio, 1993) that is specific to the gameplay system of the action games. However, this impression is soon dispelled through what the game presents to us. The motorcycle crash experienced by Sam Bridges[2], protagonist of the plot, will be symbolic throughout the entire game. Including, will symbolize, equally, the representation relations that now we detain to analyzing between game and social

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[1] In the classic *Simulacres et Simulation* (Baudrillard, 1991), Baudrillard introduces us to the concept of "hyper-reality", based on a short story by the writer Jorge Luís Borges in which cartographers of a given empire sought to create maps of provinces with extreme verisimilitude. The hyper-reality is the full expression of the simulacrum's precession in relation to its referent – the reality. The idea of desertification of the real comes from the fact that, given the regime of simulations experienced since post-modernity, "the real will never have again the opportunity to be produced (...)" (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 9), having, therefore, what the author calls the desert of the real: an empty instance to be filled and built by the hyper-realistic simulations. Such locations pointed out in the game metaphorize the idea of emptying, of desert, a no man's land in the eyes of the fictional society that dispenses the material conditions of that labor class - the deliverymen - in favor of the hyper-reality of consumers in which it remains.

[2] Played by actor Norman Reedus.

reality, whether the neoliberal processes of uberization[3] of work (Slee, 2017; Abílio, 2019), transferred to the game design of the game in question.

For a long time, the Death Stranding player will have to get used to intense and tiring walking routines for both (user and avatar), reason why many consumers did not get so much satisfaction from this playful experience. The old artifices that have always worked for regular gamers are little employed in Sam's journey. This hero's call to the journey involves, for example, collect the suitcases scattered around the place of his accident (of work?), manage the weight of his luggage between the two sides of his body and avoid falling while walk not to harm – no to himself, but to the loads he will carry so much. That is, therefore, the cultural turn that has already been built a few decades ago in the universe of digital electronic games: the colonization process undertaken by the society's social system (Luhmann, 2000) towards entertainment systems, or, to put it another way (what here it wants to make see), the so-called colonization of the neoliberal rationality on the representations of the game under analysis and the respective socio-procedural behaviors of the subject players.[4]

The implications of such a process are manifold. We could think, for example, in the way with which the representations present in design can negatively influence the deepening of the injustices about the social strata involved, the so-called design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), but for now we focus on analyzing the representation marks constitutive of the transposition of the precarious work logic to game design and the drawing of some narrative elements of the game.

A few words about neoliberalism

Controversy is a key word among studies on the concept of neoliberalism, "(...) a term in itself in search of some explanation and critical challenge" (Venugopal, 2015, p. 166). Despite this, some contributions on this issue have already been proposed and discussed since the Walter Lippmann Colloquium of 1938. As Always occurs, the term gained a common and somewhat pejorative use, serving to designate, among other things, the privatization processes and market deregulation, in addition, obviously, of the new directions taken in relation to the welfare state (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). In the 1990s, this conceptualization migrated from the economic field, also starting to compose the interpretations about politics, as well as the cultural field. It is practically an alternative denomination for contemporary society itself, or rather, for the new phase of capitalism.

The distortions are always expected from the moment that common sense appropriates such constructions, almost always through mediation processes perpetrated by the media. However, the academy, more specifically the Social Sciences, took up the concept from the beginning of the 2000s, when the posthumous publication of Birth of biopolitics (Foucault, 2008). In the book, Foucault analyzes neoliberalism from a perspective of studying forms of government; of the historical forms of what he calls the "art of governing", both in German neoliberalism (ordoliberalism) and in the United States, observing, therefore, an archeology of the term. What the author invariably finds is the way in which the State guides or constrains the actions of individuals, including instituting a model of self-government.

Far from a logic in which the State would be destroyed, dismantled, neoliberalism makes the State work for the economic interests of the private sector. Thus, neoliberalism ends up emerging as an

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[3] Uberization is just the phenomenon, observable more strikingly from the work experiences of the Uber company, of precariousness of labor relations, which will be extended posteriorly to many other professional categories in the labor market.

[4] Niklas Luhmann (2000) defined a system through the differential composition between autoreferentiality, whether it is the dissimilarity to what he considered the surroundings of the system - everything that, contained within the system, differs from what surrounds the system on the outside —, and heteroreferentiality, the elements of analogy to the environment. Translating it to the context of the games, heteroreferentiality would be composed of aspects exogenous to the game, coming from the world of the "real reality", to employ an another definition by same author, exerting, both instances, mutual structural couplings.

ideology or economic policy, prescribing ways of living and behaving in society. The market, or the idea of the market, will diffuse into fields beyond the market; fields of subjectivation that will produce subjects suitable for this type of system. Without the behavioral agreement of public life, the market as we know it today would never be possible. In this way, there are no limitations to the power of the State by the neoliberal operativeness, but redirection. The question for Foucault (2008, p. 160) consists of knowing:

> Could it be that the market can effectively have a formalizing power, both for the State and for society? (...) It's not just about letting the economy free. It is a question of knowing how far the political and social information powers of the market economy will be able to extend. Here's what's at stake.

From 2008, interests for the concept only grew, given the last crisis of capitalism, from which, for many, we still cannot get out. In *La Nouvelle Raison du Monde*, released in 2009 and published in Brazil only in 2016, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016) elaborated an in-depth study about neoliberalism, updating many of their issues and discussing from the perspective of the rationality present in such a market logic. For Dardot and Laval, neoliberalism rationalizes both the actions of rulers and the postures and behaviors of those who are ruled. In other words, our lives, in the face of neoliberalism, are ruled by the market logic, admitting the imperatives of concurrence and the forms that are specific to the commodification of private companies. It is, therefore, a "normative system that has expanded its influence to the entire world, extending the logic of capital to all social relations and all spheres of life" (Dardot and Laval, 2016, p. 7). This new governmental rationality is the result, according to the authors, of multiple historical factors, which do not disregard the classical models of neoliberalism, but at the same time do not reiterate it either.

The element of concurrence, which for the aforementioned authors is fundamental in explaining neoliberal rationality, will follow a path that will pass from the market to the State and from there to individuals, in a totalizing way. The concurrence will bring to individuals the need to see themselves as entrepreneurs of themselves, in the molds of a subjectivation. All people will be seen as market agents, or companies, who will think of themselves within an ethic of selfishness, of individualism. For David Harvey (2008, p. 27), adherent of the Marxist perspective,

> we can, therefore, interpret neoliberalization either as a utopian project to carry out a theoretical plan for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to reestablish the conditions for capital accumulation and restoration of power of economic elites.

From work and its current precarious condition

The word work has been familiar to us for a long time, since we were born after all. Work finds its etymological root tied to the image of an ancient instrument of torture, the tripalium. The meaning of work that comes from the ancient world accepts notions such as "life and degradation" or "social happiness and slavery" (Antunes, 2005, p. 11). According to Karl Marx (2013), for example, work can be considered as a marker of difference between men and the other animals. However, in capitalist societies, work ended up admitting dysfunction in relation to the Marxian understanding, that is, it ended up running away from any positive function.

Faced with work, neoliberalism conditions disciplinary orders many different from those experienced in older times. Things change name but don't lose substance. Faced with the so-called shared economy (Rifkin, 2016), the neoliberal idea revolves around the subjective construction of a collaborative sense in which consumption can be much more dispersed than it would be in a traditional property relationship. Data, algorithms, social networks, internet will be the pillars of the new market configuration

within neoliberalism, shaping the so-called platform capitalism. Arun Sundararajan (2016) defines the sharing economy regime based on the creation of new markets and services, in networks that spread by crowds, the so-called crowdwork, or the dissolution between the personal and professional levels and the constant confusion between the universes of leisure and work. In the words of Richard Miskolci (2016, p. 277), "(...) in the digital society we live in a continuous on-off line, in which – connected in a network through platforms – we consume, but also create and share contents".

Precarious work is right the most up-to-date version of the neoliberal matrix of capitalism in the labor field. This precariousness comes from the contractual informalization processes and the excessive freedom granted to the market. Allied to this, we have the complex of digital technologies as an infrastructural basis for its adequate development, which can also be called the uberization of labor relations. The softwares now intermediate the relationships between contractors and employees, including the reconfiguration of these positions, exchanging them on a continuum.

Uber, as we know it, is born out of a collaborative consumption, a concept that had already been designed by Silicon Valley technologists themselves. Technology plays a crucial role in the equation of sharing goods and services, as it provides the conditions for the existence of certain interfaces through online platforms. Thus, we have new arrangements in the digital age of the capitalist economy that transmute services into authentic goods. And between requesters and requested, we have the solicitous radicalization of labor deregulation.

The uberization process is very expensive for platform economy. While dependent on technological advances, only now, with the infrastructure of connections, it could consolidate itself by relating consumers and service providers through software. Tom Slee (2017) explains that Uber originated from the conjunction between a digital app and limousine drivers. Given the success of the undertaking, it started to offer services to non-professional drivers, jumping from 10 thousand to 150 thousand drivers in a period of two years (from 2013 to 2015). Nowadays, with extremely higher numbers, the company registers drivers of different cars without any requirement, except the fact of having your own vehicle and a cell phone with internet access. Slee (2017) also emphasizes that Uber consists of a market deregulation mechanism, in view of the precarious work conditions implemented by the company for its subscribers.

The drivers' admission conditions, for example, require them to bear the costs of acquisition, maintenance and conservation of their respective vehicles. Without a contract and without labor rights, the driver is helpless by law in the face of uberization. As Ludmila Abílio (2017, online) says, "being a profile worker in a register of the crowd means, in practice, to be a self-employed worker, who assumes the risks and costs of his work, who defines his own journey, who decides on your dedication to work (...)".

The rhetorical logic of the company, which comes from contemporary neoliberal rationality, is efficient insofar as it strengthens values such as the spirit of entrepreneurship, freedom of schedules and the absence of subordination - at least direct and immediate -, even mixing with the logic of liberalism and conforming, as conceptualized by Éric Sadin (2016), a technoliberalism. In fact, what happens is a pulverization of social ties between worker and company representatives, a kind of big bureaucratic Other never seen, in individualist work regimes. With uberization, workers are led to admit modes of subjectifying their own labor condition as entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 2008), even though, effectively, they are submitted to a company app that interconnects service providers to consumers, acting, moreover, managed algorithmically. Therefore, the entrepreneur of himself (neoliberal) is transmuted into a "subordinate manager of himself" (Abílio, 2019) in the contexts of practice.

This means that the productivity of Uber drivers is indirectly managed by sophisticated algorithmic processes, under which operation the driver is subjected to the acceptance of races - with indefinite working hours - mainly through messages that emphasize goals, approaching goals and declining ranking due to rejections to the provision of the service. In addition, the company's application requires the customer to make judgments about the service, positively or negatively evaluating their shuttle driver.

The relationship between price and demand for the service, the so-called dynamic tariff, is calculated by an algorithm without the possibility of knowledge on the part of the service provider, much less the temporary contracting party. True black box functioning is processed by Uber's dodgy dynamics. These are forms of explicit control that decouple rhetoric from practice, anchored, according to Ricardo Antunes (1999, p. 86), "in a subjectivism and a fragmenting ideology that makes an apology to exacerbated individualism against forms of solidarity and collective and social action".

We know that Uber services are no longer restricted, and only, to the transfer of passengers between destinations, but also work with food delivery, through the so-called Uber EATS. In this case, as in the original version, the company understands that its service comprises the provision of an intermediary technological platform for connection between passengers and independent third-party providers, as explained in the company's terms and conditions.

The market competencies required of information workers, or infoproletarians (Antunes & Braga, 2009), revolve around the capacity to be entrepreneurs, flexible, permanently updatable - just like the applications they manage - and that have mobility. The domain of informational language and logic (Castells, 2003) is an obvious requirement. Also, with regard to Uber, doubt and absurdity arise as we think about legal contracting: would it be work with technology or the transport of passengers and packages? How to do justice to the anti-humanist irrationalism towards which the barbaric capitalist economic system has historically led us?

The elimination of jobs is the strong trend of the future of work. For this, the strengthening of areas of automation of production processes, such as robotics, contributes to this. Submissions at any price is the way in which the ethos of the hero of everyday life works, the info-proletarian of late capitalism, making overflow its precarious condition to explicitness, evidently into the domains of art and technical objects.

The permeability relationships between the worlds of games and labor have gained breath in recent research – such as the work of Thiago Falcão, Daniel Marques and Ivan Mussa (2020), which takes a sharp look at the correlations of strength between producers and online game consumers under the aegis of platforming.

The game Death Stranding is a fundamental example of these relationships. Our approach follows the path of gathering information, narrative elements and design aspects experienced through gameplay mechanics, especially those that build the meanings of the work in its uberization phase. We emphasize that we now entertain ourselves examining such information from the point of view of a second-order observer (Luhmann, 2000), that is, aware that what we are now observing is already a product of multiple observations in society, reified in the final game product .

The neoliberal rationality in Death Stranding

The aforementioned loss of transport of the protagonist at the beginning of the game adequately illustrates one of the concerns and despairs experienced by platform workers (in Brazilian capitals, at least). Losing vehicle for any application deliveryman would be experienced from butterflies in the stomach. And that's exactly what happens to Sam Bridges at the moment his motorcycle tumbles off one of the countless cliffs he rides: the feeling that something really bad was happening.

The idea of the difficulty imposed by the visual landscape of the game's scenario is evidenced from such a scene. The challenge is intuitively perceived: traverse the immense valleys, or at least that level, on foot. We are facing an inglorious, everyday hero, an ordinary man, commonly seen as just another deliveryman, or a powerful representative of those who, a year after the game's launch, would become so common to our routine – to the point of many critics of the game to point it out as a near prophecy of

the 20's pandemic.[5]

And it is in the very first scene that emerges the confused idea of common subjects about their own social practices performed in everyday life. Upon meet, suddenly, the secondary character Fragile, Sam warns her - and also himself - that he is only a delivery man; that he "makes deliveries and that's all". It is clear, due to the avatar subject's own reflexivity, that he admits his working condition as being that of the fordist model of work, that is, the individual worker who performs one and only one activity in their daily work. We therefore have what Marx would call alienation, expressed in the character's own individual self-reflection.

In addition, Sam appears to present characteristics of heightened indifference, radical so to speak. The character doesn't shake hands the few people he has contact with; he doesn't hug them and doesn't linger on conversations, glances, distractions other than those inherent in his work. Fragile appears to Sam in a cave, location where the two converse briefly from interstitial encounters to routine tasks. She appears and disappears at will during the plot, as virtual contact or binary signal, being evident an analogy between Fragile and digital technology itself. She is a mediation point between Sam and the things that happen in that universe. The cave even takes us to the Platonic myth extensively referenced in fictions, in which someone from outside explains to the alienated subject how things really work. There is, therefore, the unconscious admission of the protagonist to an individualist subjectivism, or neoliberal, if we prefer. Sam spends most of his time alone and develops his skills, his outcomes and his joys in the face of achievements, alone.

Let's think, next, about game mechanics. If he tries to walk aimlessly, without strictly calculated movements for the accomplishment of his greatest objective, that is, to deliver the objects assigned to him in good or excellent condition, the hero comes to the ground without the slightest ceremony. And the HP[6] level, typical of human avatars, starts to compose the integrity of the materials, claiming the legitimacy of the matter in detriment of the represented human. It is also interesting to comment on the game mechanics called urinate. Here's how it works: the player is suggested to make the protagonist urinate in any of the numerous locations in the game's open spaces. Far from being a mere rhetorical illustration of realism, insofar as it leads the player to perform a basic physiological action with his avatar, we will see that it is a symbolic mechanism, or from a symbolic violence, calculatedly suited to the logic of education and political coercion imposed by neoliberal economic provisions. Occurs that the avatar's urine, when expelled inside the support bases, or dormitories through which he passes on his journey, can be stored and reused as raw material for the production of certain items that will be used in the player's working time – a specific type of grenade. So, even the hero's physiological fluids serve the protagonist's work as a first-need input, evidencing the deplorable character of modern work conditions imposed by neoliberal rationality, and what seemed to be spontaneous mechanics inherent to the world of nature, transmutes whether in merchandise and form of government. And behold, to complete the connecting threads between design and representations of precarious work, and with the extradiegetic world itself, Monster energy drinks cans are made available in the respective Bridges shelters to be consumed by the character. The reference to the market is explicit and, at the same time, it matches very well with the utilitarianism proposed by the mechanics demonstrated above.

Another element that becomes part of the gameplay mechanics throughout the course of the game, and that generates an immediate strangeness in the game, is the presence of a fetus delivered to the protagonist some time, later in the story. The little being, gestated in vitro, is now attached to the chest of Sam's work uniform, being carried throughout the game. This fetus produces several symbolic

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[5] Here we make an ironic reference, due to its dromological obsolescence, to the Covid-19 pandemic of the beginning of 2020, which transmutes it into a quasi-event of the last century, seen from a phenomenology of the acceleration of social time.

[6] From English *Health Point*, that is, health points or life points of any characters.

interpretations and curious analytical observations that only reinforce the representational relations of the neoliberal logic in the game, speaking in favor, for example, of anti-birth public policies, of the culture of disengaging workers from parental relationships as a success factor and adequate entrepreneurial commitment. The subsumed idea is that the humans of that universe are very likely born artificially - a recurring theme in science fiction -, bureaucratically managed as things to be transported, as much as any delivery of our hero. During the narrative, we even discover that the mother of that fetus is dead, making us believe in the dispensable condition of the woman in that world. Social assistances related to parenthood are also unnecessary for all that design tells us.

The sleep. Our hero sleeps little and when he does it is always in the dorms of the company he works for. Private property exists only for the owners of the means of production, but not for their workers. The rest facilities are all the same, and besides serving to the rest, they are excellent in reminding the character of his status as a company employee – a few souvenirs received by Sam are deposited there and are displayed until the end of the game. A corporate pattern experienced in any state of game's United States of America. Sleep and wake up undergo profound changes in that world, ritualized by the process of handcuffing oneself to sleep and removing handcuffs to wake up, a control technology that reminds us of the harsh criticism made by Jonathan Crary (2014) in his 24/7 studies of sleep. The baths are also biocontrolled, extremely brief occasions, taken in a few seconds – radicalizing the duration of a shower. The dormitories, in fact, are almost always meeting points between Sam and Fragile, being the idea of colonization of spaces also extremely present, making up the confusion between public space and private space. After all, the protagonist doesn't really have a space to call his own: everything, including himself, belongs to Bridges.

The lack of decent working conditions, an important factor and present to the precariousness of work in society's social system, permeates all gameplay hours of the game. They are goods packed in heavy suitcases, which can reach hundreds of kilos, supported by the arms and legs, shoulders and back of Sam Porter Bridges. The irony reaches its apex with the development over the course of the game of an exoskeleton designed specifically for the purpose of greater strength and better movement of the delivery man in spaces. It's as if the game's makers said: we know it's impossible, so we're not going to further ruin the immersive gameplay experience, already so hampered by the various pervasive references that the contemporary extra game now undertakes. Precisely because of the constant gameplay on foot, walking for hours through the space of that universe, the inherent desire of players is to run, as well as practiced in various video game titles. The run button is an extremely important material component for the consolidated self-referential system of electronic games. But, in Death Stranding, this condition is colonized by the coercive design of the elements surrounding the system, that is, caused by the rationality of precarious neoliberal work.

The Bridges company's delivery and redirection stations are true neoliberalized strongholds. The hero is under suspicion at all times. The game's system wants to demonstrate that the fictional company's computerized system, something the protagonist himself is encouraged to provide maintenance and make it work, it's just his biggest boss: upon arriving at Bridges' bases, Sam initially undergoes a scan in order to recognize his identity. Then, the cargo he carries is thoroughly scrutinized for metrics of material conservation, durability, and integrity levels. Doubt and schism constantly fall on the great hero of work. The game's enemies, peculiar invisible beings (underclasses?)[7], they may well justify the fact that there is an automated recognition by the installations of the present buildings there, and this justification is exactly

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[7] The term underclass corresponds to a creation of the North American journalistic environment, later appropriated by the Social Sciences, and which, according to sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2001), designates a new segment of minority poverty (those who occupy the lowest level within a hierarchy of classes), commonly used as an object of social prejudices and suspicions. Here's the question from Sam Bridges' point of view: "underclass beings?" — the invisible, strangers, suspected of cultural deviation and, therefore, susceptible to the subjectivation of hostility on the part of both, the system and the player.

the point of legitimization of the suspicious practices: Sam never asks himself about these protocols.

The work is extremely precarious. There is no glamor or spectacle to guarantee a sense of leisure to gameplay in Death Stranding. It is necessary to fall in love with suffering and difficulty. It takes the sense of heroism proper to a lone warrior. It is necessary to be used to environments that are almost always empty of life. And, above all, trust in some future reward, final, for all the pain suffered. It is necessary to work with fervor to achieve something not yet defined by the higher instances that govern that avatar.

Over time, the avatar shows itself subordinate to the game's NPCs. These begin to act as legitimate consumers, demanding the most diverse orders and deliveries. It is important to emphasize that the delivery work performed by the player begins with a request from the political leader of the United States, in this case, a fictional woman president. This is one of the strongest representational marks from a neoliberal point of view in the game. The president's request is for Sam to travel across the United States in search of re-establishing the so-called chiral network, a fictitious internet. The intertwining points of theory with digital representations are explicit: the government is used here as an agent conditioned by the private sector. The required governmentality can only happen insofar as the player can reintegrate all federation units to the telecommunications and private information network, represented by the company in which Sam is an employee.

Well, this is just the first delivery request made to the avatar, with promises of employability and a stable future. However, as soon as game hours pass, we realize that work orders almost always comprise requests from individuals and private sectors. The hero starts to be on his own, subjected to complaints, suggestions, ratings and praises, just like an authentic application worker representative.

Despite the onus related to his transport is the entire responsibility of Bridges, when the matter involves the impossibility of taking the controllable vehicles of the game, the player is at his own luck and risk. In a way, most of the time, commands and missions are governed by the market itself, that is, by NPCs and other characters presents in the game. They almost always complain about the delay in delivery, which demands from the player more avatar control expertise in their routine actions of balancing weights and motor skills in the face of countless terrains of navigable space. Encouragement messages are also conveyed, such as NPC William Lake's: "The Legend is back. Everything appears to be in perfect condition. Thanks, Sam. Until the next delivery, then. Be alright". To some extent, we also have the naturalization through the design of side quests of what Byung-Chul Han (2017) calls a performance society, or society of performance and production. William Lake, suggesting Sam's participation in the "Extra Mile", a supposed program with more benefits for deliverymen, recommends:

> (...) a successful delivery to the destination is your job, first and foremost. But people are demanding. They don't just want their stuff loaded from point A to B. They want a little more, you know? Special treatment. Something that can put a smile on their faces (our translation).

When he realizes, Sam is delivering pizzas and receiving rewards like tips for his work. What is left of public contracts with the US government are, as we said, just promises. Thomas Sutherland, another NPC, states in an email that it shouldn't be easy for Sam to keep up with categories like cargo condition, quantity, volume of deliveries, Bridge Links. And he adds: "I have a little advice for you: focus on speed. That's the most important thing when we deliver." The way to get this, says Thomas, is to shorten routes. And he completes: "How about break a record in a Premium delivery? Advantages not just for customers, but for your body. Hold on, Sam: you'll be the top-ranked Porter of all time." The NPC Die-Hardman at one point tells us: "a delivery will remind citizens that they are connected to the rest of the country. It will give them hope."

"And more work means more rewards", says a loose NPC, the no pain, no gain ethic – the liberal discourse of inequalities of opportunities and results comes alive. "You must be exhausted. Why not take

a break?", still affirm Die-Hardman. Sam proceeds to the private room, always lying tiredly and sleeping in handcuffs. The derisory rewards for work in the form of aggressively ironic benefits is another striking feature of the precariousness of work represented in the game, typical of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017). For example, at the Capital Knot City Distribution Center, Sam earns a gratitude token after the greeting of a delivery task: a hat named Bridges, for his good services. On another occasion, the NPC Film Director hands him another souvenir, sporty sunglasses.

A final sarcastic representation of the game appears to us farther along in the narrative. The individuals, as we've already said, are almost always absent from the physical spaces represented in the game's scenario. The NPCs and other characters appear to Sam as holographic representations at the character's main stopping points. In a totally indifferent way, the character Amelie, sister of the protagonist, claims that humans were made to live together and help each other. Occurs that, once again, we are faced with paradox as a criticism of the current state of affairs, in which urban life has increasingly experienced the supreme decay due to the new individualistic operational logic of neoliberal capitalism. In fact, whenever he approaches a distribution center the avatar shouts a "hello" or "is anyone here?", followed by a deep and heartbreaking echo in the vast landscape of the place.

Final considerations

We noticed in our elaboration the colonization of the game by neoliberal capitalism from the representations contained in the game design, as well as in the narrative elements (hypothetically subject to separation) of the game Death Stranding. Firstly, it must be said that the game's central motive itself already practically elaborates an outline or summary of the neoliberal economic political practices seen so far. This is a form of expression that is very specific to the system (Luhmann, 2000) of digital electronic games, whether it is its ability to mimic problems, tensions and new social dynamics from, and linked to, sophisticated game design mechanisms. In this way, the game Death Stranding critically contributes to thinking about social mismatches and the loss of dignity in countless contemporary labor relations, arising from the new phase of capitalism, the so-called platform capitalism.

Among other issues, the advent of more elaborate themes and discussions from the representational point of view by the game mechanics and their intricate narratives, leads us to secondary observations such as that the level of realism used in a game can end up going beyond the possible limits of fun, of immersion, of the illusion of ludus itself. At the same time, for players accustomed to realistic plot compositions, Death Stranding elaborates a discussion and point of view extremely close to what we theoretically discuss here about precarious work and neoliberalism.

Evidently, our contribution with this article aims at an analysis that is very specific and partial due to its results, through a phenomenological hermeneutics that follows, to some extent, some of the possible sociopolitical images to be retained when playing one or some matches. The reading, therefore, continues in an open world, and must exist as a promoter of debates and critical-analytical views on the instances and conceptual tensions held here. Death Stranding represents any kind of artistic lucidity, therefore also of knowledge, about social and political phenomena, being an expression-game that translates the pervasiveness of the world of work on the possible worlds of a precarious leisure.

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