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## SLANG, LANGUAGE OR METALANGUAGE? ON THE FLEETINGNESS OF WORDS

If we take a look at the contemporary urban design in the foreground there are the concepts of sustainability and participation. The first requires understanding of environmental needs, the second – the needs of people. An instrument needed is language – a language of the project. So urban planning is all about communication. The article faces the problem of design processes moving from abstraction to reality through the fleetingness of a constantly changing language.

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To put it simple, urban planning is an effort of trying to do something for the future on the basis of the past (data) in the fleeting present. Contemporary, i.e. mostly sustainable, urban planning is all about communication. Is there anything more fleeting in its form and permanent in its essence than a language? Anything more changeable than a slang? What is a slang or a language or a metalanguage as far as urban planning, i.e. finding space for architecture and people is concerned?

There is a mean used in both education and training, in the fields of politics, economics or sociology, called gaming simulation. As far as many designers and users are concerned, games and gaming simulations have become a medium if not a language. Within the framework of a common system each participant is able to face the complex problems from many different perspectives.

In the last 50 years, gaming simulations met with many vicissitudes of fortune: the years of glory in the 60's and 70's, decline in the late 80's and at the beginning of the 90's and the triumphal return in this millennium. They have many names too: simulation

and game, played simulation, gaming simulation, not to mention many linguistic *nuance*. The one that seems to be the most appropriate is *gaming simulation*: a *gestalt* (form, scheme and representation) where a significant model of reality (**simulation**) is working (on the basis of **rules**) due to participants' decisions (players/**roles**) [1]. It is an elaborated version of the definition by Duke (1974) that attributes to gaming simulation the function of a continuously updated physical, symbolic, conceptual etc., map. This map becomes the only instrument capable to reach the idea of the present and of possible futures.

One may say that there are as many classifications of gaming simulation as authors – each publication starts with such a paragraph. As a result, there is a multitude of different hypothesis. They are all useful in a certain way, but it is impossible to take them all into consideration. The most popular classifications and taxonomies are those by Taylor, Klabbers, Feldt, Duke, Catanese, Corbeille and Hobson. They all share an assumption and belief: they are three

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basic elements in the gaming simulation design – the game, the players and the rules, all contextualized in a scenario/model/simulation that moves from abstraction to reality.

Because of the fluidity and variety of different taxonomies mentioned above, it is impossible to give a rigid definition. It is far easier to determine what a gaming simulation is not instead. It is not a military game. It is not a business game. It is not a political game. It is not a game on game theory. It is not a video game. The digital revolution offers new possibilities of working on image and simulation environment. The new media, having changed modes (and ideas) of communication, creation and interaction, have changed radically our way of thinking. It reminds the impact that, according to Nietzsche, the invention of a typewriter once had. And it is not a computer simulation.

Unlike one might think, the goal at the rise of gaming simulation was an operational research, not participation and/or communication instrument. One of the reasons of its development and popularity is the fact that even the simplest game seems to be able to calculate simultaneously many acting factors better than an abstract and sophisticated mathematic formula. The character of gaming simulation favoured its use in the field of education and training (*transfer of knowledge and information*), of scientific research and of techniques of information and communication support [2].

Urban gaming simulation provides an interactive and efficient type of communication. In fact, Feldt defines the urban gaming simulation a *technique of communication*. It confirms us in the conviction that gaming simulation can be considered both instrument of communication and language. Those characteristics that made of urban gaming simulation an affective medium can be synthesized as five aspects (Feldt, 1989): pleasure, utility, flexibility, economy, abstraction. From the characteristics of gaming simulation

mentioned above, a new definition results: *Gaming simulation is a technique and a methodology that expresses itself in effects/consequences of actions/decisions made by actors/players who act on the basis of pre- or self-defined rules.*

In the course of running gaming simulation there are some perceptive passages: the first one is disorientation, the second one is orientation and control, the third one is acquisition of a competence, where the game is abandoned if does not offer some *alternatives to explore* that could put to the test those new competences, in other words: the higher degree of consciousness of the game and its rules. The fase of leaving the world of the game is when the players face the real world. But the way they face it, is different – now they share a common language developed in the cours of the game. The language that have become ‘their’ language, the language of players, that one called the *slang* of game.

Both Duke (1974) and Klabbbers (2006) focus on the construction of a slang taking in consideration the concept of *language* as well. Most users and designers – from Feldt and Rycus [3] to Duke [4] – point out the communicative nature of gaming simulation. Therefore, the game has its specific value of a language and yet being a language it can describe the experience of learning another language. Nevertheless, you can’t describe the experience of learning how to use a language because to do so it would be necessary to imagine a state without any language, something similar to thinking what would it be like: not to think [5].

If a language includes all that is necessary to give symbols a sense and if a game is a language, it seems useful to understand that gaming simulation having a game among its constitutive elements can be considered a metalanguage.

If you open a dictionary (or if you search in Internet), you will see that *metalanguage* is a *language to analyze language*. But if you search deeper, you will discover that, in fact, *it is a system that provides analysis of*

*general linguistic structures and, for this reason, belongs to logic and not science of the object languages* [6].

Defined this way, the term corresponds with dual nature of gaming simulation: naturalness of the game on the one hand and metalogic of simulation on the other. As a metalanguage is an artificial linguistic system through which it is possible to analyse structures and symbols of a real language, gaming simulation represents the complex systems of anthropical environment.

The concept of ludification used here is a complex one and its communicative and interactive dimension is unimaginable without the presence of bluff, communicative and non-communicative manipulations, applications of demagogies and *simulacra*. At the same time, it implies the acceptance of plurality and multiculturalism that entails changing game codes and symbols. By consideration causality and unpredictability factors of social construction of reality, the differences are accepted. Regardless of any opinion, it offers new perspectives for studies on theory of gaming simulation: in the evaluation of failures and collapses of system during the gaming sessions, the *unpredicted incidents* become the beginning of the new circle of activity rather than a catastrophic margin.

Therefore, the gaming simulation is a metalanguage that is able to make the participants aware of the control of their own destiny managing the complexity and ruling the uncertainty that accompanies it. It may be considered a poetic synthesis of a generating system of metalanguage, similar to the one of gaming simulation – endless:

*Soigner soigner les sauriens du calcul et les bipeds qui pourtant savant compter parler compter parler soigner soigner parler compter compter compter compter compter compter soigner soigner soigner soigner soigner soigner parler parler des sauriens du calcul et parler* [7].

Endless will lead us to what is eternal, eternal to what is time resistant or better, according to contemporary urban concepts, time resilient. And language we use to communicate as well as the language we use for the design and research purposes is something that keeps the world of the project and reality going.

*Lupus vulpem arguebat* [8].

## ENDNOTES

[1] Rizzi 2004.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 47.

[3] A. Feldt, M. Rycus, *Analytical methods* [in:] H. C. Dandekar, *The Planner Use of Information*, APA Planers Press, Washington 1988.

[4] R. D. Duke, *Gaming: the future language*, SAGE Publications, New York 1974.

[5] See: Wittgenstein, 1930.

[6] See, for example: Giacomo Devoto, Giancarlo Oli, *Il dizionario della lingua italiana*, Le Monnier, Firenze 2002, entry: *metalinguaggio*.

[7] *L'uomo sa parlare, contare e aver cura di loro* [le macchine], e loro sanno parlare, contare e aver cura dell'uomo.

(...) *in questo finale in cui la cosmogonia si dissolve nell'universo umano della parola, sembra già risuonare il rimbrotto che il papagallo Laverdure ripeterà a Zazie. "tu causes, tu causes, c'est tout ce que tu sais faire". Italo Calvino, Piccola guida alla Piccola cosmogonia, (1978–81) in: Raymond Queneau, Piccola cosmogonia portatile translated in Italian by Sergio Solmi, Einaudi, Torino 1982.*

[8] *Lupus vulpem arguebat, vulpem lupus arguebat, arguebat lupus vulpem, lupus arguebat vulpem, vulpem arguebat lupus, arguebat vulpem lupus* – in Latin, which is an inflective language, the meaning remains the same regardless of word order. A. Duranti, *Antropologia del linguaggio*, Meltemi editore, Roma 2000.

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