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• Paper / Proposal Title:
Digital Kenosis: Eschatology and Representation of the Post-Ideal City in Videogames

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• Abstract (300 words):

Videogames are a complex and articulated industry, which in recent decades has reached extremely refined creative peaks. Many studies have focused on the technical, psychological, and ethical impacts of gameplay on the player. The design of the urban setting, and its influence on the player’s actions in virtual space is, on the other hand, still underestimated.

In this paper, I will analyze the visual urban imagery in ‘Bioshock’ and ‘Dishonored’, a series of videogames set in cities in crisis, and its relationships with the player. In both franchises, indeed, the urban narrative linked to a post-pandemic dimension changes according to the player’s choices. In this sense, the urban space represents an ideological dimension of power against which the protagonist/player collides, often violently. The protagonist, like a semi-conscious actor, faces within the urban experience several complex issues such as the political use of religion, the neo and post-liberal ideology, the oneiric dimension of city and the relationship between classes.
The paper aims to analyze social institutions described in the two franchises, observing how the cities are designed to become autonomous narrative devices, disconnected from the purely playful dimension of the game, which conveys apparently independent messages. Like the cities described by Kevin Lynch, the two cities in ‘Bioshock’ (Rapture and Columbia) and the two in ‘Dishonored’ (Dunwall and Karnaka) are shaped by the action of the inhabitant.

The four case studies will reveal urban elements of social alienation, not due to scalar anonymity of US metropolis, but linked to a break in the relationship between power and its representation in the community. Furthermore, the evolution of cities along the two franchises, will demonstrate how this break takes on eschatological and apocalyptic tones, with moral implications that are found, and apparently resolved, in the following chapters of the videogames.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Marco Spada is currently a Lecturer in Architecture at University of Suffolk. Marco is an architect (ARB registered) and urban planner, holds a PhD in Architecture, Theories and Project from Sapienza University of Rome, with a thesis on the industrial landscape.

He was previously Honorary Associate at the Department of Geography and Planning of the University of Liverpool, where he studied the implications of post-industrial regeneration dynamics on urban and built environment.

He carried out research activities in Rome, Tuscany, Poland, Kenya and the United Kingdom. Specialized in urban narrativity, sustainability and circular economy, he worked in Milan as Project Manager and Design Consultant.