

Dialogue between public and private lives: adolescent identities and new media

Pilar Lacasa. University of Alcalá, Spain p.lacasa@uah.es

Sara Cortés. University of Alcalá, Spain srcrtsgmz@gmail.com

Rut Martínez. University of Alcalá. Spain rut.martinez@gmail.com

Paper to be presented at



May 3-5, 2013

<http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit8/>

Abstract

The goal of this presentation is to analyze the dialogue between the private and public lives of a group of teenagers in the process of building their identities when they participate in social media through mobile devices or computers. More specifically, we analyze the contributions that a group of 18 students (14 girls and 4 boys) made through a blog created at a workshop where they played *The Sims 3*, a simulation game, and machinima productions. Both the school and the research team aimed at contributing to the education of citizens capable of participating in the digital world in a reflective way. We seek to build educational settings in which multiple social media platforms are present to promote the development of written language and digital literacy. Adopting an *ethnographical and action research point of view* (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006), we explore the conversations in the classroom, the entries and comments on the blogs and the multimedia productions that were generated at workshops designed to introduce video games and other new media in the classrooms using these tools for educational purposes. Both the theoretical review and the analysis of the data, obtained through the analysis of all blog posts, show that traditional conceptual distinctions are diluted in three directions. First, the difference between real and virtual worlds is blurred. Second, the examples analyzed have shown how students intermingle public and private lives related to a clear awareness of the audience, with expressions that would traditionally be limited to the private sphere. Finally, imaginary characters, rooting in the community, populate spaces, contributing to the creation of a collective identity.

Key words:

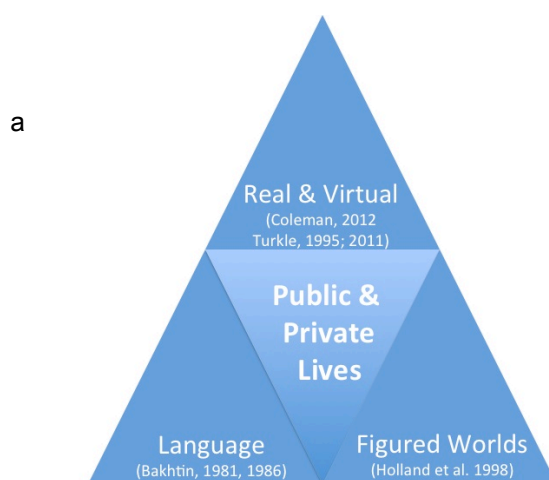
Public & Private Lives, Adolescence, Blogs, Identity, Imaginary Worlds

The Starting Point

The world of children and young people generates specific challenges when examining their relationships with new media.

The theoretical framework is rooted in two theoretical perspectives approaching culture, such as the classic works of Bakhtin and sociocultural psychology, which understand human existence and language as a form of dialogue. From this *dialogical approach to the world*, consciousness of self is based on the relationship with others. Secondly, our starting point is also provided by studies related to *computing culture*. For example, B. Coleman's approach, who reflects on the notion of avatar, and Sherry Turkle's work, concerned with the construction of stories and autobiographies in virtual worlds. Both approaches are intertwined at the time of defining the central concepts around which our study is organized (these concepts appear in Figure 1). Those are the three axes forming the core of this study and will be reviewed in depth, after having presented our methodological approach.

Figure 1. Public and private worlds in adolescence



We have already pointed out that this work is organized around three key areas. We will first see how new media have brought along new communication context in which they break down the barriers between real and virtual worlds. Our workshop allows us to explore this question, that frames the relationship between public and private life. The students played *The Sims 3*, a social simulation game, which helped to overcome those borders. Exploring their activities will help to understand how new media create new environments that transform adolescents' real and virtual lives and how new identities are constructed involving specific relationships between their public

and private worlds. We will consider how the boundaries between real and virtual are blurred by looking at the two dimensions that have traditionally been considered to define a simulation game: on the one hand, its rules and, on the other, the stories that the game allows to build (Juul 2005, 3878; Fullerton 2008).

Secondly, and considering the aforementioned framework, we will examine how differentiating between the public and private worlds of adolescents poses a challenge today. Facebook, Twitter and other similar platforms enable a type of communication in which boundaries between these two areas do not exist. For example, when participating on Facebook, everything is public. It is true that this platform also lets people to send personal messages but, paradoxically, this fact contributes to depart from traditional e-mail, which allowed us to maintain a certain level of privacy. Gone are the days in which teenagers wrote every day on a small notebook often protected with a lock. However, there is something in common with these regular expressions which were normal less than ten years ago: Both new and old communication contexts involve written language. Young people express themselves through writing and by using images and sounds. Language is the arena which opens the door to both old and new private and public universes.

Finally, Dorothy Holland and her collaborators (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain 1998, 3181) lead us from language to identity, which goes beyond private life. We will focus on the concept of figured and imaginary worlds, defined socially, historically and culturally. This idea goes beyond a simple distinction between public and private worlds. Shared representations are the arena in which identity is constructed in specific situations, relying on language and action. Exploring how adolescents tell us about their experience in *The Sims* game and verbalize it involves a process of identification in which, as we shall see, the kids intertwine their aspirations with problems close to their daily lives. It is a historical and cultural process in which stereotypes are projected, stereotypes which would be difficult to understand without referring to the

immediate social reality. In our research, the kids projected their aspirations on a blog which went beyond the boundaries between public and private worlds.

Methodological Approach and Data Sources

Looking at specific situations to explore how the private and public spheres are present in adolescents, we focus on school contexts and examine how teachers and children use commercial video games. Adopting an *ethnographical and action research point of view* (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006), we explore the conversations in the classroom, the entries and comments on the blogs and the multimedia productions that were generated at workshops designed to introduce video games and other new media in the classrooms using these tools for educational purposes. We are interested in observing, analyzing and explaining these personal and collective practices and in learning their meaning. Hence, our results may help to enable educational and innovative scenarios in schools and families (Chase, 2011).

In this paper, in which the analysis of the kids' blogs and multimedia productions are the main focus to explore private and public spheres in children's lives, we adopt the discourse analysis perspective (Gee, 2010; Tannen & Trester, 2013). In this context, Herring (2013) asks herself if the *Web 2.0* needs new approaches both theoretical and methodological. She differentiates the *Web 1.0* from the *Web 2.0* considering, among others, the following dimensions: Personal vs. Blogging, Publishing vs. Participation, Britannica vs. Wikipedia, Content Management vs. Wikis and Directories vs. Tagging.

She uses the term "*computer-mediated discourse analysis*" (CMDA), which is especially relevant in our work. As a model, it focuses on four discourse dimensions: structure, meaning, interaction management and social phenomena. Moreover, she proposes three organizational levels for the analysis: familiar, reconfigured and emergent (Tannen & Trester, 2013).

- *Familiar*: The written text remains the predominant channel of communication among web users.
- *Reconfigured*: Some changes have taken place in both technology and communicative practices. These have resulted in the reconfiguration or reshaping of a number of aspects of discourse. For example, quoting others' messages, small stories, turn-taking, threading or intertextuality.
- *Emergent*: People expressing themselves on the *Web 2.0* use discourse phenomena that appear to be emergent and unprecedented, at least as common practices. These include video exchanges via image texts and multimodal conversation.

This scheme is particularly relevant when analyzing the students' blogs, which are the main corpus of data in this paper. This analytical framework allows for analyzing the way they use language and the complexity and novelty of their contributions in relation to the acquisition of digital literacy. This involves knowing the possibilities of digital media, including not only written language, but also other non-traditional modes of expression, considering that this one is associated with writing on a piece of paper. People are using new kinds of discourse that we need to explore.

The project

The project has been carried out in a *secondary school environment* where very different workshops took place, each one of them being defined by the following features: a) the participants, namely boys and girls, their teacher and the research team; b) the school as the physical and social context in which the activity takes place; c) the video game around which the different activities are organized (Dezuanni, 2010). In this paper, we define workshops as innovative scenarios where new technologies coexist together with those already consolidated. In these scenarios, opportunities are created for boys and girls to gain new abilities related to digital literacy. In the workshops, video games coexist with the Internet, blogs and social media, as well as with other tools (such as photo or video cameras) which contribute to educating in the use of multiple communication codes.

This study is part of a larger research that was carried out during the 2010-2011 school year with the participation of three schools in Spain, two of them public and one private.¹ All the schools have integrated commercial video games in some of the class groups and curriculum topics. The research team worked with the teachers participating in the preparation and monitoring of the workshops. In this article, we focus on one of the workshops held during the 2010-2011 school year at a private school near the University. The management of this private school contacted us in relation to an innovative experience they wanted to introduce into the school. The workshop included 12 girls and 6 boys aged 16 to 18. It took place during hours normally used for supplementary educational content. The students participated voluntarily with a Spanish language teacher and a technology teacher. The school's director occasionally attended the sessions, and there were always 2 or 3 people from the research team present who were responsible for recording the sessions and providing support whenever needed. In addition to this, a film director who had previously developed media productions for teenagers attended the workshop. We carried out 14 sessions in which the kids interacted with video games and together thought and discussed the strategies to move forward through the screens. They also made an audiovisual production of their own recordings of the game (the machinima process).

During the workshop, we played and reflected on *The Sims 3*, the simulation game where people create several characters and live different stories. *The students wrote their impressions in a blog open to all audiences and a forum to which only those students participating in the project had access. Comments and posts on this blog are the main data in this paper:* <http://aulacista.blogspot.com/> (April 31 to June 14). Moreover, we need to point out that all the sessions were video-recorded and we also filed all the children's and adults' productions. Additionally, every researcher produced daily summaries of the sessions, thus enabling multiple interpretations of the same activities. We understood analysis as a circular process in which interpretations began even during fieldwork (Holstein & Gahrium, 2011).

Table 1 includes a synthesis of the main data for this paper focusing on the blog:

Student	# Post	# words	# Characters	Group Work
				Multimedia production
Zarrandicoetxea	3	521	2989	One night
Paloma	4	492	2866	One night
Alejandro	5	347	1906	One night
Victor Cista	4	638	3686	The Tomasa story
Nerea	9	817	4608	The Tomasa story
Blanca	10	1152	6606	The Tomasa story
Alejandro García	1	30	170	This is Tomasina
Margarita Cista	4	826	4902	This is Tomasina
Rocio	11	698	3863	This is Tomasina
Patty Cista	5	802	4676	Tomasa
Veronica	7	991	5628	Tomasa
María	10	1325	7265	Tomasa
Marcos Cista	2	169	103	Tomasa story ...
Noelia	10	1587	9411	Tomasa story ...
Lucia	11	1260	6837	Tomasa story ...
Tanarro	4	1041	5964	Tomasa's life
Davide	5	333	1753	Tomasa's life
Soledad	11	871	4792	Tomasa's life

¹ Please note that, in the Spanish education system, public schools are 100% government-subsidized whereas all private schools charge tuition fees, which vary from school to school.

Table 1. Main corpus of data

In the following pages, we will explore this blog to reflect on the dialogue between public/private spheres, adolescent identities and real/virtual worlds. Moreover, we will examine the underlying interactions between the actors, authors and interpreters of the texts in the context of the particular culture in which they are immersed. We especially analyze how multiple identities may shift associated with certain practices and activities in virtual and real worlds, not really differentiated.

To understand the examples introduced below, we need to keep in mind that the students participated in a workshop for six sessions of about two hours. They played The Sims 3 creating a story in small groups and always had the same main character (named Tomasa), although each group could create a different life and physical and social environment for her. The events that occur in the game, the character's life and the context are discussed on the blog. In addition to this, they developed an audiovisual production using machinima techniques which they completed with recordings of everyday life contexts with the support of a film director who visited the school and attended some of the sessions.

In this paper we understand machinima, according to Paul Marino (2004) as **the art of creating animated movies in real-time by using a 3D game engine technology**. We assume that, in using this technique, people will be made aware of the rules of the game, its content and the audiovisual discourse of this digital universe. According to Manovich (2001), this implies a different form of reflection other than that which occurs when using an oral discourse in the classroom. The students presented their audiovisual productions in a final session.

Living in Real and Virtual Worlds

When the boundaries between real and virtual worlds disappear, relations between public and private worlds are transformed. We will now look at the universes created in the lives of young people by the presence of technology. The work of Sherry Turkle (1995, 2011) will serve to support our analysis of the concept of simulation. In our workshop, we have generated simulated worlds and social activities when students play The Sims. We will present how young people break the barriers between real and virtual worlds: by mainly, by living in a fantasy world in which carnival and humor are present, that's how they come to be aware of the rules of the game and go beyond the distinction between public and private worlds

Simulation and virtual reality: the rules of the game

Turkle (1995, 2792) introduces the concept of MUD (Multi-user Domains), a kind of social virtual reality, a [multiplayer real-time virtual world](#) which is of particular interest when trying to understand the relationship between virtual life and multiple worlds, public or private, linked to identity. Her work is almost 20 years old, but it is still valid today, especially since she has a recent publication on the same subject (Turkle, 2011). Since in this study we have worked with The Sims, a simulation game, the context described by the author is relevant to explore the virtual and real worlds the kids live in.

As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction. (Turkle, 1995, pos. 78)

However, the most relevant part of her approach is that these virtual worlds (MUD) are also related to a gender of identity which goes further than private lives:

In my computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language (...) I meet characters, who put me in a new relationships with my own identity. (Turkle, 1995, pos.163)

Let's see what this author says about The Sims, in her work published in 1995. According to her, this game starts to change the concept of video games. People do not try to beat the rest of the players, but to overcome the challenges involved in the game; what's more, all gamers can move in the same direction. At that time, progress during the game is related to the fact of

building social worlds. The game allows a social life and our students were aware of it and expressed it clearly on the blog.

The fragment we introduce below clearly shows how students are aware of the rules of the game in a collective world beyond public and private. They explicitly refer to specific difficulties during the game and to the way they overcome them by working together. Focusing on the discourse that they use from a grammatical and pragmatic perspective, we notice that, when describing their activities, most of the times they use the first person plural and hardly ever the singular. This is better understood if we take into account that the activity involves working as part of a team.

Fragment 1. The awareness of the rules of the game

LUCIA. Thursday May 5, 2011

THIRD DAY!!

Today, after not having played much The Sims 3 during previous lessons, my group (formed by Noelia, Marcos and myself) began furnishing the house, improving the garden, changing the color of the rooms and so on. The one we chose, which was already furnished, wasn't too pretty, that's why we are making some changes.

That's the only thing we had time for, as it is very hard to choose the colors, floor types, walls...

We've also built a parking space for Tomasa's red sports car. We've added a room to the house, in case Tomasa ever has a child, with the floor in the colors of a jigsaw puzzle. Choosing Tomasa's room floor has been the hardest, because we either couldn't agree on one or we didn't like it. But in the end we've fixed that.

I hope we start playing "living mode" on the next lesson.

I'm liking this project very much because it is a new way of learning through play. This way, when we finish the project we'll know more than we knew before... ;)

Those paragraphs above describe a sequence of actions in the game, oriented to achieve some goals. The gamers play to build a physical and social environment, that is, The Sims allow them to build figurative worlds by using tools provided by the computer. Additionally, the game allows them to live multiple lives, free of charge, and to have experiences that are very far from people's everyday lives.

The more you understand how simulations work, the more sophisticated a consumer you become. Sure, for some people just play along, but if you use your brains while you play, you become simulation-savvy.

This point has also been made by Will Wright, the developer of SimCity, who said of his creation, "Playing is the process of discovering how the model works."(Turkle, 1995, pos. 1304)

We must also keep in mind that the game has an educational component. The model of life presented in it might be something with which we disagree as players but, in any case, the positive aspect is that its limitations allow and help us to become aware of the rules of the game.

Play and simulation

There is no doubt that, almost 20 after Turkle wrote the texts and ideas just discussed, the context provided by simulation technology is quite different. At that time, the virtual space was outside the idea of mobility, always present today:

You need mobile communication to get the notion of the life mix. Until recently, one had to sit in front of a computer screen to enter virtual space. This meant that the passage through the looking glass was deliberate and bounded by the time you could spend in front of a computer. Now with a mobile device as portal, one moves into the virtual with

lucidity and the ego. This makes it easier to use our lives as avatars to manage the tensions of everyday existence. We use social networking to be "ourselves" but our online performance take on lives of their own. Our online selves develop distinct personalities. Sometimes we see them as our "better selves". As we invest in them, we want to take credit of them. (Turkle, 2011, pp. 160; pos. 3128)

The networks and multiple spaces created with the advent of digital technologies associated with mobility make it easier to play with identity and break down barriers between public and private spaces. The new avatars are now living experiences unimaginable 20 years ago. For example, they may be present in Facebook or any other social media. The lived space and time have changed, more powerful devices have replaced the old phone that only allowed us to talk. Even while people are studying, working or watching TV, they can multitask and move through cyberspace by using the same instrument:

Identity play is the work of adolescence. These days adolescents use the rich materials online life to do that work. For example, in a game such as The Sims Online (think of this as a very junior version of Second Life), you can create an avatar that expresses aspects of yourself, build a house, and furnish it to your taste. Thus provisioned, you can set about reworking in the virtual aspects of life that may not have gone so well in the real. (Turkle, 2011, pp. 178; pos 3491)

In the following fragment, we will explore how the video game becomes much more than a set of rules. Gaming invites to participate in a playful world that allows us to break the rules of everyday life, even keeping in mind that the game has its own limits. It is worth reading the following text carefully, we are facing a world of fiction where there is an awareness of politically incorrect facts. The character's life is transformed and also becomes comical and fun:

Fragment 2. The Sims as a play about the students' life

Verónica. Monday, May 23, 2011

NEWS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Tomasa doesn't stop.

First, we've tried to turn her life around. We wanted some changes, even if they weren't politically correct. In the first place, we tried to create a police file with her name on it... She had a fight with a boy, so hard they almost killed each other, but it wasn't enough to be sent to jail. (I've read on Patricia's post that she already knows how to do it, hahahaha)

Also, TOMASA HAS MOVED! The "motherlode" trick is awesome. Now she has a hell of a house. Although the decoration is horrible, as we've loads of money we'll change it completely. All we need now is for Stiles, the boyfriend, to agree to move in with Tomasa – from what we've seen, the poor guy is quite shy and old-fashioned.

VERÓNICA. Wednesday, June 8, 2011

NOT LONG TO WAIT FOR THE PREMIERE!!

The worst has happened: TOMASA DE AQUINO MCGRAW DIED. She aged amazingly quick and left our world. (A moment of silence...) We all grieve her loss.

Teens are aware that they have created a fantasy world. No matter if it's public or private, everything is permitted. Students live a life as they play, where they project their aspirations. When building a world through an avatar, an identity is projected on it, something desired, and we can play with it consciously. The avatar is a real-life practice, it is irrelevant whether it is placed in a public or private world, what is clear is that it is shared through language, not only oral or written: images and multimedia discourses are also present.

Dorothy Holland and Bakhtin help us to understand how, during the game, the differences between public and private worlds vanish through the idea of carnival:

We can use Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (discussed in Chapter 8) to understand how carnivalization becomes a real force. Dialogism pictures social and cultural activity as a manifold phenomenon, of a variety shaped by the juxtaposition of incommensurate voices not only within but also between figured worlds. Bakhtin's dialogism sets everyday social life in what might be called an "inter-world." This postmodernesque phrase describes the condition of a sociality whose generality derives from the convention of many figured worlds. (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 237-238)

The game leads people beyond the immediate environment, but always in a social and collective universe where individuals and privacy disappear. We enter into culture through play and supported by others. In addition, world domination during the game also depends on our imagination.

Public and Private Spheres: The Role of Language

The aim of this section is to show how new social contexts are transforming the relationship between the adolescents' public and private worlds. The new scenarios are supported by new technologies and the differences between real and virtual worlds vanish. We will first refer to how new social platforms have transformed these universes and then, to the role of language in the construction of these new environments.

New social settings: boundaries between public and private fade

The classical authors help confront social phenomena that are hard to understand today. This is what happens when we get closer to Bakhtin's ideas:

The image of the becoming person begins to overcome its private character (of course, within certain limits) and to enter a completely different, spacious sphere of historical being. (Bakhtin, Holquist & Emerson, 1986, pp. 249)

According to this author, people become persons when individuals overcome the private sphere of language. The person is constructed as such by his/her presence in a public sphere related to society, history or culture. The concepts used by this researcher seem to anticipate the communication scenario in which young people move today. Now, people build their public and private profiles on social media. Even privacy is no longer something to keep to oneself, because it is extended to others, both known and unknown. Moreover, public worlds with global access, in which unknown audiences are present, did not exist until recently, except for those who were professional communicators.

Sonia Livingstone, in more recent work, points out how social media help shape the public and private worlds in which teens evolve:

The very language of social relationships is being reframed; today, people construct their 'profile', make it 'public' or 'private', they 'comment' or 'message' their 'top friends' on their 'wall', they 'block' or 'add' people to their network and so forth. (Livingstone, 2008, pp. 394)

The self is immersed in a community. Today, more than ever, it Mead's idea makes more sense than ever (Mead, 1934/1967). In this idea, "I" also includes "me" (self). "Me" is what is learned in interaction with others and with the environment, the person speaks of his/her self in a social context that configures him/her. As Livingstone (2008) said, social media, blogs, etc. are public spaces provided by the Internet as the universe where the "I" builds its representations ("Me") considering other people. An audience is present, even if indirectly. Every person constructs his/her biography by thinking of other people.

The distinction between public and private is fading, at least as it was traditionally understood. For example, in a social network such as Facebook, teenagers are clearly exposed to others when building their profile, even if it is a private setting. Although it is a space defined as personal, he or she choose a specific network because his/her friends were involved in it, and from that moment on it becomes public. Taking an audience into account, whether implicitly or

explicitly as is the case when writing for the Internet, turns into public what used to be private a few years ago.

Turkle (2011, 5216) has also insisted on something similar. In her opinion, teenagers in today's world build their autonomy by facing challenges that did not exist a few years ago:

Adolescent autonomy is not just about separation from parents. Adolescents also need to separate from each other. They experience their friendships as both sustaining and constraining. Online life provides plenty of room for individual experimentation, but it can be hard to escape from new group demands. It is common for friends to expect that their friends will stay available – a technology-enabled social contract demands continual peer presence. And the tethered self becomes accustomed to its support. (Turkle, 2011, pp. 174. pos. 3385)

Young people grow up in new environments, often virtual (like social media) and sometimes simulated (e.g. multiplayer online games), but both of them require people to participate in specific communities or find new friends. The traditional concept of friendship is transformed, personal friends are less significant in social media or blogs. The example provided below helps us to outline these ideas, present in Sonia Livingstone's and Sherry Turkle's work. Let's see how Noelia, one of the students, expresses an awareness of that *distant audience* when writing on the blog.

Fragment 3. The differences between public and private become blurred

Noelia. Wednesday, May 4, 2011

TO BEGIN WITH IT ALL...

Well, I must say my first experience has been really gratifying.

We've already written many posts telling what's new, that we've created Tomasa de Aquino...

And the truth is, if you could experience the same we are experiencing now, you'd like it.
I, for one, am loving it. Even if I am quiet a lot of the time.

We began by creating the house, building a pool, felling down trees, building walls, taking some land... Well, we did lots of activities with our avatar. I love how this has began. We'll see how it goes from now on. Although it looks real good. SOMETHING DIFFERENT...

This text is quite relevant, especially since two dimensions are intertwined here. First, Noelia's referring to her audience, which she addresses openly. She has a clear awareness of it when she writes, "And the truth is, if you could experience the same we are experiencing now, you'd like it." Then, she acknowledges that she is *quiet a lot of the time*. This justification lies in a dimension that could traditionally be related to a private setting. On the other hand, Noelia describes the activities in the game; they have created a home with particular characteristics (those allowed by the game).

Summing up, firstly Noelia is aware that her blog will be read by her classmates and by other people. It is clear that some years ago the audience to which school writings were oriented was only the teacher. At that time, relationships were placed in a interpersonal setting, now discourses are oriented to a much wider audience, perhaps not well defined but of which the writer is aware.

Language as a transformative element

Speaking of new social environments requires considering the tools that mediate and make possible the relationships between people. We will approach sociocultural psychology to explore these tools. Immediately we find the presence of language, which becomes an engine that maintains and transforms not just social interaction but also the people involved in it. In this context, language as a mediating instrument goes beyond the spoken word. Written language, images and sounds as forms of representation of the immediate world come to the fore. This is where the contribution of the classical sociocultural approach lies in relation to public and private interactions. Dorothy Holland seeks to understand the roots of social relationships in

Bakhtin's work (...). For this author, social interaction is much more than a simple projection of one person over another:

Bakhtin's concepts allow us to put words to an alternative vision, organized around the conflictual, continuing dialogic of an inner speech where active identities are ever forming." (Holland et al., 1998, pp.169)

That is, public and private, collective and individual, are best understood from the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism (Holquist, 1990, 3180). Dialogue implies assuming a responsibility when facing a situation which is continually changing and demanding specific answers to certain external affordances:

Dialogism begins by visualizing existence as an event, the event of being responsible for (and to) the particular situation existence assumes as it unfolds in the unique (and constantly changing) place I occupy in it. (...) I am in a particular place, and must respond to all these stimuli either by ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing—for it is a form of work— meaning out of such utterances. (Holquist, 1990, pp. 47)

Social responsibility involves the use of language, because people attribute meanings through discourse, they assign meaning to something that already exists. In addition to this, when using certain words that have been previously used, these must be rebuilt dialectically. According to Bakhtin, language is never unitary; it goes far beyond a grammatical system of universal standards. The social and historical life of people creates a multitude of concrete worlds and belief systems in which language is rooted. Language is not neutral, because it depends on multiple intentions and accents:

Language—like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives—is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 170)

The speakers cannot ignore the fact of living in a concrete world. Looking at the mobile scenarios created by digital technology, speakers communicate with each other, transmit their aspirations, values and universes they rebuild from their daily activities. It is the written or audio-visual language which becomes the instrument that makes the interaction in virtual environments possible. Here, personal history becomes a public event because there is an audience, even if sometimes the person is not aware of it. That is, language is just a tool, a framework of interaction between the self and others, and always involves the self as "I" being "Me" (Mead). This is the context in which Dorothy Holland contextualized the process of identity development:

It is not only being addressed, receiving others' words, but the act of responding, which is already necessarily addressed, that informs our world through others. Identity, as the expressible relationship to others, is dialogical at both moments of expression, listening and speaking. (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 172)

The self is something open, it brings with it a position in which meaning is constructed and always involves taking into account the responses of others. Meanings arise not only from the state, but also from the history. That is, meaning is built from a context, and it is now defined by the blog in which students have to participate. Consider again an example from Noelia's blog:

Fragment 4. Language and audiences

Noelia. Wednesday, June 1, 2011

A DAY AT THE MOVIES :D WITH MIGUEL, THE DIRECTOR

Right now, we are shooting our first movie for the important activity we are carrying out. Our story is really hard to act out, but it's fun. In case you ask what it's about, I won't give any secrets away :D, but I can tell you it's super fun. Also, we were with Miguel, who came over to do some interviews on what we thought about it and the like. I felt like a celebrity, since we were shot with a TV camera and were asked many questions about what we thought of the workshop.

Clearly, we find three different levels in this text. First, she describes her activity in the workshop: "We're shooting a movie." This is a description that also includes some judgment. Second, we notice that immediately, a little later, she speaks directly to her readers: "*I can tell you it's super fun.*" This awareness of the text making sense within the group, so clearly manifested here, is rare among other students who participated in the workshop. Finally, near the end of the text, she introduces a personal reference, *she felt "like a celebrity."* We see again how private and public areas become increasingly blurred as students discuss their blogging activities.

According to Bakhtin, the fact that language is significant beyond its structure is what leads to social criticism and what allows people to enter the world of politics. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is not a description of actual speech, it goes far beyond the structuralism of Saussure (Saussure, 1959) when linguistic structures of speech are viewed from a reductionist approach. Bakhtin wants to focus on human experiences related to meaning. The dialogic language puts us in touch with each other and all in a public sphere. This is the theoretical framework from which we try to understand the posts that our students wrote on their blogs.

However, we can further explore Bakhtin's work when it comes to understanding the world's public and private construction of identity. His studies of the novel are also a review that is projected on the forms of social organization. Moreover, his work even allows us to approach the concept of democracy, together with the significance of language. Novels are much more than a set of texts; they are the embodiment of both a historical situation and the critical principle that might address it:

For the consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms, but a concrete heteroglot opinion on the world. All words taste of a profession, a genre, a movement, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, a day and hour. (Bakhtin, 1981, cit. in Hirschkop, 1999, pp. 19)

From this starting point, and according to Hirschkop, the following principles can be considered to understand the Bakhtinian approach to language and democracy. Exploring the social dimension of language, is an open door to the analysis of democracy in today's world, in particular among young people. Two aspects need to be pointed out:

- *The intersubjective or communicative nature of language.* As already mentioned, communication involves the presence of others. This is what happens when young people express themselves through the Internet. Their speech comes into a community, implicit or explicit, as people begin to write for other people. Furthermore, in this community, there is a commitment to the group to which the person feels he or she belongs.
- *Linguistic authority and power.* This means that in this community, in the public sphere, not all speakers play the same role, there are roles and power relations between them. It is interesting to analyze how these relationships are present in the new areas that integrate the public and private world among young people.

It is clear that in schools there are very well defined roles, and people, both adults and younger, recognize them immediately. In the traditional school, it is taken for granted that someone (the students) has to learn and others (the teachers) are there to instruct. In our study, this kind of roles do not appear when students write in the blog. Their comments there and their references to the social environment reveal a different situation. In this environment (the workshop, an activity within the school), relationships seem to be much more symmetrical. There are no references to the teachers. In the text below, we can see an interesting description of what happens during the workshop. Both references to the avatar and to the students' activities when they are working with their peers are present:

Fragment 5. What happens during the workshop

BLANCA. Friday, May 20, 2011

PARTY TIME!!!!!!

Last Thursday, we threw a party and invited all our friends and people we know. We spent the last minutes trying to come up with an idea for the movie we are going to make later on, but we couldn't think of any. I hope the next day we already know what the movie is going to be about, so that we can record some video game fragments related to the topic we've chosen.

Tuesday, June 14, 2011.

THE DAY HAS COME

Today, we finally showed all the videos. I like ALL of them very much. I think all groups have been very imaginative and we've all worked hard on creating the final product. To finish, I've enjoyed this project very much for the following reasons:

1. I've got to know people I had never really talked to before.
2. I've learned how to play The Sims 3, a very interesting game.
3. We've worked in groups, which we rarely do, as it is easier to work alone.

Reading the text, we observe how this student values the context of group work created in the classroom, something that was unusual. There are several indexes that support this interpretation. First, she uses the plural and the first person; she explains how they looked together for an idea from which to generate the movie (*a collective action*). Second, not only she values the work of her group, but also focuses on other people and consider it to be positive. Third, in her concluding remarks she expresses openly that they have learned to value collective actions.

In this context, it is interesting to see how it is possible to define a set of approximations that, to some extent, allow us to define a world of categories expressing different approaches to the relationship between public and private in the world of young people. These practices result in different meanings, and public and private have different meanings when involved in such practices. As we can see, language is the tool from which students build a collective world.

Following Hirschkop (1999) and taking these data into account, we can look at other dimensions of language, especially relevant when we move in a multimedia universe:

- *The differences regarding the medium in which the experiences are embedded.* From a formalist approach to discourse, the structure of language present in oral speech, in print and in electronic media would be identical. By contrast, from an intersubjective perspective, the differences in the medium of expression are not neutral, they determine fundamental aspects of speech such as the way in which the audience is determined. the number, etc.
- *The process of linguistic self-reflection or 'metalinguistic discourse'.* This point is especially relevant to our work because students learn to perform metareflection processes, something traditionally associated with literacy. Learning a language inevitably entails being aware of it: understanding language is not a simple and unreflective process, but often a highly self-conscious interpretative one.

The fragment we introduce below shows how students are capable of metareflection, accompanied with the use of images. Patty also provided us with a picture of her avatar interacting in the cemetery with a ghost.

Fragment 6. Metareflection and media discourse

PATTY. Sunday, May 15, 2011

MAKING GHOSTLY FRIENDS

We finally could play for a while on "living" mode. My group and I wanted Tomasa to get a boyfriend, so we went around Sunset Valley looking for one.

There were several candidates, but one of them was too young and another one too old, there was one who already had a girlfriend... She didn't get a boyfriend, but she made some friends.

Since Tomasa didn't know what to do, she went to the cemetery, because you can find ghosts there when it's late. That's what she did, she met four ghosts and she spent a good while talking to them.

We finally found her a job she liked! Now she is a fan... Yes, a fan... In this game, that's a job... and with the money she got for it (A LIE) she also bought the most expensive car she could buy.



Figure 2. Images clarify and support written text

In the previous text, the metareflection process is observed in the fact that there is a clear awareness of the game, where gamers control the lives of its characters. For example, it is clearly stated that, to achieve certain goals, they must follow the rules of the game ("We finally got to play on live mode for a while") to achieve a goal, in this case, to find a partner for the avatar, which proved to be difficult. In addition to this, they need to find a job for the main character. Finally, by introducing the term "lie" when referring to the money the avatar will earn at work, this student clearly shows awareness of the character living in a fictional world.

We have to insist on how students use not only written language, but also images. In any case, this was not something too common in this workshop. The scene that Patty described in the text would have been more difficult to understand without this image. Using this resource is an indicator of the awareness that students have about publishing in a non-traditional media. (Tannen et al., 2013)

To close this section, we will refer to how public and private lives are intertwined in the students' texts. Their language, whether written or audiovisual, strengthens their relationships with others and contributes to build images of the world through different dimensions. Their worlds are present, at the same time, in the process of an identity construction, projecting aspects out that in a world without the Internet might belong to a private sphere. Moreover, our students move in a virtual reality, difficult to separate from what was considered a few years ago to be the real world. In the following section, we will explore how private and public lives relate to a process of identity construction.

Identity and Figured Worlds: A Bridge between Public and Private Life

So far, we have shown how people live immersed in specific worlds involving collectively constructed meanings and dynamic in space and time. These meanings provide worldviews organized through characters rooted in collective imagination. Young people find them interacting with mass media or other entertainment resources. We will now focus on how they elaborate their public and private lives immersed into collective universes.

Figured worlds and identity

Let us think of *The Sims 3*, a simulation game that could be considered as a cultural tool. In the game, some characters will represent heroes and even social values very close to those that came from the company that distributes the video game. Consider, for example, specific extensions of this game such as [The Sims 3: Katy Perry's Sweet Treats](#). These tools provided by the surrounding environment are reconstructed through personal or collective activity in a circular process. That is, people build imaginary worlds in order to give meaning to their activities. As Dorothy Holland puts it, they are *imaginary worlds which are built by people when they act and become a bridge, like language, between public and private lives*. Let's see how this researcher defined them:

Cultural worlds are populated by familiar social types and even identifiable persons, not simply differentiated by some abstract division of labor. The identities we gain within figured worlds are thus specifically historical developments, grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization of those worlds' activity. They are characteristic of humans and societies. (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 41)

Holland also refers to several features that describe them:

- Figured worlds are historical. This means that they develop through the world of participants. Things or objects are not static but part of processes or traditions from which they make sense.
- They arise from a particular context related to the position of the subject. Those positions are not just temporary in space, but also cultural.
- They involve social encounters between participants. They depend upon the interaction and the intersubjectivity for perpetuation: its meaning is not born of a single mental process, but continually reconstructed in interaction with other people.
- They relate not only to actions, but also to the voices, and are synthesized in this fourth feature that involves a social context, a voice, a historical development and activity.

In short, to Holland (p. 38) identity is built on situations and takes into account both language and action in a dynamic, social, historical and cultural context. Identity makes sense in relation to figured worlds. We assume that figured worlds are a meaningful context to explore the adolescents' private and public lives. The fragments discussed below are a clear example of how public and private lives are intertwined by combining personal lives' expectations and social stereotypes probably conditioned by a particular family and social environment. In the text, it is striking how the avatar is projecting certain hopes of what can be the life of a young woman in Western society. There is no doubt that what conditions these aspirations is the game and the values in it.

Fragment 7. Identity and stereotypes

BLANCA. Tuesday, May 17, 2011

LOOKING FOR A BOYFRIEND

Today, in the end, we've decided for Tomasa to quit her job to have more free time to do stuff. Tomasa has spent the whole hour looking for a boyfriend, but she's failed, some of them have kicked her out because it was late, some other have left in the middle of a conversation... The

most interesting thing Tomasa has done today is recycling newspapers, otherwise everything stays the same. I hope we can find a good boyfriend for Tomasa next Thursday.

DAVIDE. Friday, June 3, 2011

FINALLY

Tomasa finally has a boyfriend. After having tried for so many days, we finally succeeded yesterday. And the best thing is that he is rich. They've tried for a baby and she is now pregnant, now they only have to get married, and maybe then we'll get a new house.

The life goals of these two adolescents, a girl and a boy, are projected in Tomasa. It is clear that they express social stereotypes: people need to find a partner, someone with whom they can start a family. Davide's words are clear: the boy must be rich, and then the avatar will become pregnant and they will have a baby. These stereotypes are the conceptual framework that helps to understand the process of identity construction in adolescence. Figured worlds come from the contexts in which people participate (e.g. family life, relationships with the opposite sex, hopes and so on). These stereotypes are part of their visions and constructions of the world, their figurative worlds.

Avatars and Cyber-drama

We can move further in the theoretical model and establish relationships between these figured worlds, social and collective constructions and specific mechanisms through which people construct meaning when they use language. The concept of narrative is very useful for this purpose. Janet Murray's model (1997) is relevant in this context, when she's exploring narratives in cyberspace. Adopting this perspective, we will use the concept of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) and relate it to the virtual spaces constructed from a simulation game. This is especially relevant in order to interpret the students' activities when playing *The Sims 3* and expressing their opinions on the blog, both about the game itself and the figured world involved in their activities.

The categories included in the model could be related to the experience of participating in an interactive environment. Taking Murray's (1997) and Laurel's (1991) model, Mateas and his co-authors (Mateas, 2004; Mateas & Stern, 2006) wanted to contribute a *new model of interactive drama*, what could be called a neo-Aristotelian model:

- *Agency*: The player will have this experience when there is a balance between the material and formal aspects of the game. By formal, we mean aspects linked to the plot and material related to action. The agency (capacity for action) is the feeling of power accompanying the fact that actions have been taken in the world and the effects of which are related to the player's intentions. It reaches beyond the interaction with the game for transforming what occurs on the screen from the controls. The effect of activity is related to the player's intention.
- *Immersion*: It is the feeling of being present in a different place and committing to an action. It allows for the feeling that this contributes to generating an argument relating to the character. It implies certain knowledge of the forms in which one may act and also the forms in which the player's action is relived. A balance is attempted between material and formal aspects. Murray proposes this through three possibilities: an avatar, structuring participation and the interaction conventions. This will all be promoted by material elements, which facilitate interaction in the game.
- *Transformation*: Whilst the agency is a first-person experience, transformation would be third person. It has at least three meanings:
 - As a masquerade: the experience of the game allows the player to become someone else whilst the game experience lasts.
 - As variety: the game experience offers a variety of experiences about the same subject. The player may explore them and advance in comprehension.
 - Personal transformation: the experience of the game allows the player to have a trip through personal transformation.

At the same time, we will try to show how these concepts help to *analyze the students' activities when playing The Sims 3*. From this perspective, we need to consider that this game encompasses a combination of values inherent to Western society and very close, as we will see, to the specific contexts in which students move in everyday life. According to Janet Murray (2004), The Sims embodies an ambivalent vision, which mixes consumerism and American urban life within a structure that appears to admire it. The player constructs characters, spaces and homes for them, creating a plot. The neighbors, other characters, may visit them and destroy their happiness. This version of the saga represents a world of values which mark what is considered to be success in society. The game is designed for them to achieve it.

Let's see how these dimensions are present in the students' contributions to the blog when building narratives around Tomasa, the main character of their stories after they played The Sims 3. Students project their own biography in the avatar, specific stereotypes taken from the game or coming from a collective imaginary. While in the previous fragment they were two students expressing similar stereotypes, the following one comes from the same author. It is clear that these two texts are connected between them and talk about the same topic, involving a higher degree of complexity:

Fragment 8. Tomasa's story

ROCÍO. Friday, May 13 2011

LOOKING FOR A BOY

Since Tomasa de Aquino has a lot of free time, we thought she should find a partner. Tomasa found a boy she found very nice and, as time went by, they fell in love and finally kissed. I can only say it was amazing!

ROCÍO. Wednesday, May 18 2011

PREGNANT!

Tomasa de Aquino is pregnant. We are going to build a very big room for the baby with a crib, a chest for toys and, if it's a girl, we'll buy her a dollhouse and if it's a boy, a football so they can play. The baby will also go to school and later, to high school. Tomasa has nausea, she vomits and she sometimes gets dizzy. If she liked to sleep before, now she needs a lot more sleep.

What is more striking about this text is how the story is built around the main character, using specific verbal forms and emphasizing the passage of time. Actions take place one after the other and they are expressed in the future tense. Everything is possible because of what has happened before. Metacognitive processes are also present, for example, there is an awareness of the rules of the game expressed by the way they have the control of the avatar. Its life can be expected in certain Western societies, and it is also determined by the landscape presented in the game. Furthermore, the separation between public and private worlds is clear. What seems to be important is projecting their hopes, they seem to assume that it is something public.

Identity and Avatars

The story just discussed leads us to Tomasa, the character that allows students to project a collective identity. Considering this avatar, the distinction between public and private spaces is blurred again. The work of Sherry Turkle (2011) is important in order to understand this:

I have argued that the Internet provided spaces for adolescents to experiment with identity relatively free of consequences (Turkle, 2011, pp.260, pos 4493)

For her, living in a virtual world means that people generate dynamic shadows and move with them. Often, they are not well defined. Again, the boundaries are blurred between the public and private identity. What a person shows to others includes what he/she is and what he/she would like to be.

When identity is multiple, in this way, people feel "whole" not because they are fluid and undefensive. We feel "ourselves" if we can move easily among our many aspects of self (Turkle, 2011, pp.194. pos 3757)

That shadow becomes something like a partner who comes and goes with different looks because people's aspirations change. Only occasionally, for example during a crisis, it returns with new force and a certain feeling of continuity. People are not always aware of that shadow, and make clear distinctions between it and what is considered some permanent identity in the real world.

However, those shadows do not always the same entity. She makes a difference between the world of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and so on and simulated game worlds. This distinction is very relevant to our work, and we must take it into account when considering the relationship between public and private worlds and the process of identity construction through them.

What happens in virtual social environments, for example in a blog? In this case, the screen limits the expression of emotions. Teens communicate through it, and personal interactions are less frequent. This change in relationships involves the use of audiovisual resources. Separation, as well as presence, is reinvented; and in this process the difference between public and private becomes blurred. Sherry Turkle (2011) asked some interesting questions about teenagers:

Do they all assume that their words and photographs are on public display? Perhaps. Traditionally, the development of intimacy required privacy. Intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means. Separation, too, is being reinvented. Tethered children know they have a parent on tap—a text or a call away. (Turkle 2011, pp. 172, pos. 3338)

But there is more. Sometimes, as in our study, people are projecting themselves into a world of simulation and fantasy. A few years ago, the real and virtual worlds were different. Now, that distinction is not so clear, as we were seeing before:

People talk about digital life as “the place for hope”, the place where something new will come to them. In the past, one waited for the sound of the post –by carriage, by foot, by truck. Now, when there is a lull, we check our e mail, texts and messages (Turkle 2011, pp. 152, pos. 2986)

From this perspective we want to show, again, how the gamer is able to control the character in all aspects of social life in a simulated social world that includes multiple fields. This explicit reference to these, the presence of different dimensions of social life, is something that had not previously appeared. Now there are chained references to personal life, the world of work, leisure, morality and even the fact that Tomasa has become the protagonist of a film the students will direct.

Fragment 9. Multiple dimensions of social life

MARGARITA. Monday, May 23 2011

TOMASA IN ACTION

Last Thursday, we kept practicing with our Sims and characterizing their lives with stories and anecdotes. My Sim has finally got a boyfriend. After looking desperately for friends all over the city, she has found love with a guy named Chris. Now she is even pregnant. In the future we want to have her married to him, we don't want any children without a solid marriage.

As for work, Tomasa has quit her job because she's inherited a lot of money thanks to the company led by a distant relative who died in a tragic accident. After the news, she decided to stop participating in the company.

She leads an immoral life, full of parties and fun, she invites her friends to her private pool to improve her relationships.

Her social impact is what matters the most to her, and her main concern is what people will say after a party. Now, she'll have to pull herself together unless she wants to attend a funeral next...

As a consequence of a very long night, Tomasa accidentally ends up in the cemetery, talking to weird creatures (ghosts).

Now, after all the images and videos we've recorded of her crazy life, we must think of a screenplay if we want the rest of the world to know who Tomasa is. It won't be easy, but we think we already have part of the story.

It is particularly interesting to note how the text intermingles different kinds of expressions in relation to the avatar's life. On the one hand, those in which gamers control the character's activities, for example, "*In the future we want to have her married to him, we don't want any children without a solid marriage.*" On the other hand, however, the character has a life of its own, according to his/her own interests in a virtual world, for example "*As for work, Tomasa has quit her job.*" To understand these multiple lives, Coleman's ideas are particularly interesting (Coleman 2011, 5053). She has also emphasized how the differences between real and virtual worlds are becoming increasingly blurred. She explores them considering the concept of avatar as a starting point; it is a good complement to Sherry Turkle 's (2011) reflections:

In this book, I argue that we have already deeply incorporated network society into our lives and that the important change to understand is the continuum between online and off, i.e., "the X-reality" that traverses the virtual and the real (Coleman 2011, pp. 172)

The reality of the avatar, the author says, is a continuous exchange between real and virtual spaces associated with different modes of representation that are sometimes customized in this avatar and which are sustained by a public network across multiple combinations:

We find avatars in graphical, real time, spatial simulation environments such as virtual worlds. In a network society, we also find them in the workings of our daily lives in the form of email missives, video connections, and other digital artifacts" (Coleman 2011, 5053, pp. 190)

Others authors have gone further and wondered about embodiment in a virtual world. For example Leaver (2012) in his book, *Artificial culture: identity, technology and bodies*, refers to the relationship between identity and technology. He wonders about how identity is formed considering what kind of tools people are handling, and also the environment in which their activities take place. According to him, artificial life involves a double dimension: first, the way that people conceptualize themselves, and second, embodiment; this term is understood as the specific carnal and corporeal instantiation of bodies, both human and non-human, which entail both visual surfaces and a meaningful interiority of tissues, organs and other elements:

The constructions and representations of Artificial Intelligence in science fiction cinema reveal both the ongoing importance of embodiment and that the only way to forward is, eventually, together. The core of artificiality is thus not oppositional to humanity per se, but rather a mechanism for revealing the importance of symbiosis between humans and intelligent machines (Leaver 2012, pp. 48)

This text suggests that people do not renounce to their bodies, even if they live in a virtual world. This point is relevant in relation to our students as they construct their identities in virtual life and project their concerns in a fantasy world, sometimes through a digital reality that is intertwined with the physical world, with its corporeality. Here's an example of how the virtual character, the avatar, has physical needs approximating to human embodiment. We are interpreting this data as a clear indication of the fact that differences between real and virtual worlds are less than some years ago. In this case, they attribute not only physical sensations such as hunger or fatigue, but also human feelings: Tomasa, the avatar, is also sad.

Fragment 10. The avatar's embodiment

NOELIA. Friday, May 20 2011

THE SIXTH DAY

Yesterday (Thursday), we continued playing with Tomasa one more day.

We were at home for a while. At first, Tomasa was a bit sad and tired, so we took her to bed and gave her something to eat. We also fed the child because she has really hungry. Just like her mother, she was quite grumpy.

(...)

We went to the gym at night, but it was a waste of time since, when we got there, there was a guy who left in his bike when he saw Tomasa. I was really surprised by the way he left :D

(...)

This is a pic of our Tomasa, hope you like it.



Figure 3. Identity and embodiment

The previous text was a clear example of how embodiment is related to the image that Noelia is projecting to her avatar. Moreover, she introduced an image showing Tomasa, the avatar and main character of the story, and her boyfriend. The image also allows us to better understand that embodiment is dependent on culture, the figured world where individuals are embedded. We return to the gaming world, playing, fantasy and fiction. This culture is related to entertainment because they are spaces in which people can more freely imagine the past, the present and the future while expectations, hopes and fears about the world of which they are part are re-negotiated for a better understanding of their daily life.

Brief Conclusions

This work seeks to approach the public and private lives of young people considering virtual and real social worlds, supported by digital technologies. We explored how this phenomena, which we called figured worlds, are present in people's identity building processes. This idea is based on both classical theoretical models (Holland et al, 1998; Bakhtin, 1981) and other much more recent models (Coleman, 2011; Turkle, 1995; Turkle, 2011).

The aim of this research was to show how opposite concepts, which made sense some years ago, have diluted as kids build figured worlds through the Internet. To support our reflections, we have focused on the activities of adolescents who interact with a social simulation video game, The Sims 3, in a workshop carried out in a secondary school as part of an extracurricular activity. Students, in addition to gaming, communicated and interacted through a blog and made machinima productions. All these activities helped to create an awareness of the spaces in which they move. Using traditional distinctions, we will say that they were public and private,

real and virtual. Both the theoretical review and the analysis of the data, obtained through the analysis of all blog posts, show that these distinctions are diluted in three directions.

First, we examined how the difference between real and virtual worlds is blurred. That is the context offered by new media, by creating spaces and conditions that transform traditional relationships between public and private worlds. People build avatars that become their shadow. Two specific scenarios have been presented: a) when people are being aware of the limitations imposed by these new worlds, for example during acting a simulation game, or b) when people live in a fantasy universe forgetting those limitations and living a new life in a "carnival" way.

Second, nothing is totally private online. Social networking or simulation games let people choose with whom they want to interact. The individual is no longer alone, because both the social network and a simulated world use language to address other people and to go into a public sphere. The examples analyzed have shown how students intermingle a clear awareness of the audience with expressions that would traditionally be limited to the private sphere.

Finally, imaginary characters, rooting in the community, populate spaces, contributing to the creation of a collective identity. Meaning is constructed through cyber-narratives that contribute to build identities. We have seen, for example, how all the stories built around Tomasa, the main character, reveal the stereotypes present in the figured worlds of adolescents.

In sum, youth identity today is built around virtual and real worlds, public or private, where differences between them matter less than a need to express to audiences which was unthinkable a few years ago. All this sets up a real or virtual world that educators, parents and researchers often forget. By being there and participating responsibly with the kids, we will understand the world without sacrificing fantasy, which has so often been forgotten in schools. Playing, imagining and creating are indispensable activities of humans, young or old, have to learn in the 21st century.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination* (pp. 259-422). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M., Holquist, Michael, & Emerson, Caryl. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (1st ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Chase, Susan E. (2011). Narrative inquiry. Still a field in the making. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 421-435). Thousand Oaks, Calif.; London: Sage Publications.
- Coleman, Beth. (2011). *Hello avatar: rise of the networked generation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Dezuanni, Donna E. (2010). Digital media literacy. Connecting Young People's Identities, Creative production and learning about videogames. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), *Adolescents' online literacies: connecting classrooms, digital media, and popular culture* (Vol. 39, pp. 15-143). New York: Peter Lang.
- Gee, James Paul. (2010). *How to do discourse analysis: a toolkit*. New York: Routledge.
- Green, Judith L., Camilli, Gregory, & Elmore, Patricia B. (2006). *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. Washington DC: AERA & LEA.
- Herring, Susan C. (2013). Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, reconfigured, and emergent. In D. Tannen & A. M. Trester (Eds.), *Discourse 2.0 : language and new media* (pp. Kindle Edition). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Hirschkop, Ken. (1999). *Mikhail Bakhtin: an aesthetic for democracy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holland, Dorothy, Lachicotte, William, Skinner, Debra, & Cain, Carole. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holquist, M. (1990). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. New York: Routledge.
- Holstein, James A., & Gubrium, Jaber F. (2011). The constructionist analysis of Interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 341-358). Thousand Oaks, Calif.; London: Sage Publications.
- Juul, Jesper. (2005). *Half-real. Videogames between real rules and fictional worlds*. Cambridge, MASS: The MIT Press.
- Laurel, Brenda. (1991). *Computers as Theatre*. Boston, MA: Addison Wesley
- Leaver, Tama. (2012). *Artificial culture: identity, technology and bodies*. New York: Routledge.
- Livingstone, Sonia. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. *New Media & Society*, 10(3), 393-411. doi: 10.1177/1461444808089415
- Manovich, Lev. (2001). *The language of new media* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marino, P. . (2004). *The art of machinima: 3D game-based filmmaking*. Scottsdale: Paraglyph Press.
- Mateas, Michael. (2004). A preliminary poetics for interactive drama and games. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (pp. 19-35). Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Mateas, Michael, & Stern, Andrew. (2006). Interaction and narrative. In K. Salen & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *The game design reader: A rules of play Anthology* (pp. 642-669). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Mead, George Herberd. (1934/1967). *Mind, Self & Society. From the standpoint of a social behaviorist. Edited with an introduction by Charles W. Morris*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Murray, Janet H. (1997). *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: The Free Press.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library.

- Tannen, Deborah, & Trester, Anna Marie. (2013). *Discourse 2.0: language and new media*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turkle, Sherry. (2011). *Alone together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.