

VITTORIO IERVESE*

SHADOW GAME: THE MOBILE STORYTELLING OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR MIGRANTS

Abstract

In this article, I discuss a project that actively involved unaccompanied migrant children (UCs) in the production of two feature-length documentaries about their experiences. These documentaries are part of *Shadow Game*, an interactive transmedia project that also includes a short documentary series, an adventure game, a photo exhibition, and an advocacy campaign (<https://shadowGame.eu/en/homepage/>). The analysis focuses primarily on the two documentaries, although the project as a whole must also be considered. In the context of upcycling and stacked-evidence journalism, the project makes each product published on the platform a piece of a unique and complex transmedia mosaic. A substantial component of this project, which took five years to complete and is still active today, positions the protagonists themselves as co-authors and co-narrators of their migration stories. In particular, the two films are largely composed of material shot by the UCs themselves with their smartphones. The two films have been showcased at documentary film festivals, in some cases accompanied by discussion workshops with other children of the same age as the protagonists. The reflections presented in this article also draw upon focus groups carried out within the framework of the Festival dei Popoli in Florence (I) in November 2023, which included the two films in the “Popoli for Children and Teenagers” programme.

Keywords

Migrant children; game; first-person mobile films; documentary; participation.

ISSN: 03928667 (print) 18277969 (digital)

DOI: 10.26350/001200_000245

Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

At a time when the conventional boundaries of media coverage are increasingly blurred, there are narratives and phenomena that can only be conveyed through participatory collaboration with the direct protagonists. In such cases, conventional information tools and even the most advanced control and measurement systems prove inadequate. For example, reporting on the lives of unaccompanied migrant children (UC) is a particularly complicated and insidious task. These children have been described as “ghosts that haunt Europe” and are subject to hostile forces of control that seek to prevent their movement and the recognition of their citizenship rights. Therefore says Geesje van Haren, co-founder of Lost in Europe, a non-profit cross-border journalism project that investigates and exposes the stories of child migrants who get lost after arriving in Europe:

Contributo sottoposto a *double-blind peer review*.

* Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia – vittorio.iervese@unimore.it

In many cases, there is no documentary trace of their passage. Large numbers do not easily capture the imagination. And even if they did, they would still give an incomplete picture, because many EU countries do not have orderly and consistent monitoring data, and in some cases do not even provide it in the face of persistent requests. So we have to rely on stories, testimonies and pieces of the puzzle that we put together in what we call *stack evidence*¹.

This statement reveals the presence of two opposing approaches to the narration of transnational migrations, and in particular those of the UC: on the one hand, the representation of a phenomenon that depersonalizes the protagonists, transforming them into particles of a threatening and uncontrolled flow; on the other hand, the accumulation of testimonies, evidence, data, etc. that reconstruct a fragmented and dynamic picture. This second approach has, in recent years, also relied on narrative practices that go beyond the approaches and methods of professional journalism. Recent decades have witnessed the proliferation of significant examples of migration narratives that rely on the direct participation of migrant subjects, with very different purposes and modalities. These examples range from documentary cinema to auto-ethnography, from “rough archives” to social networks. The transition from hetero-narrative to self-narrative is not a straightforward process. In most cases, these are participatory representations, constructed through the interaction between different subjects, using a variety of tools (professional and non-professional), in different locations (public and private), seeking a compromise between what is narratable and what must be kept hidden because of its illegality.

In this article, I present a project that actively involved UCs in the production of two feature-length documentaries about their experiences. These two films are part of *Shadow Game*, an interactive transmedia project that also consists of a short documentary series, an adventure game, a photo exhibition and an advocacy campaign². The analysis will focus mainly on the two documentaries, although it is useful to keep in the background the project as a whole. In the context of an upcycling and stack evidence approach, each product published on the platform is a piece of a unique and complex transmedia mosaic. A big part of this project, which took five years to complete and is still active today, sees the people involved as co-authors and co-narrators of their own migration story. The two films are mostly made up of footage shot by the UCs themselves with their smartphones. Some of the ideas in this article came from focus groups held at the Festival dei Popoli in Florence, Italy, in November 2023. These groups included the two films shown as part of the “Popoli for Children and Teenagers” section.

The most interesting part of this work for *Shadow Game* is the way it examines how people tell stories in gaming. As we will see, UCs refer to “the Game” as the hurdle race that must be run to cross the Balkans and enter Europe. The whole journey is like a game, with different stages and challenges to get through. There are successes and failures, plans and problems, and a start and an end goal. However the relationship between UCs’ self-representation and the game is not limited to this metaphorical framework. As Galloway reminds us in his analysis of video games, the experience of the operator/player differs from that of the filmmaker/viewer primarily because it takes place in the first person, and in this way the entire narrative action becomes part of the diegetic space: “If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then *video games are*

¹ G. van Haren, “Giornalismo investigativo Cross Border”, in *Perdersi in Europa senza famiglia. Storie di minori migranti*, edited by F. Cecilia and G. Angela, Roma: Altreconomia, 2023, 12.

² “Shadow Game Homepage”, accessed May 5, 2025, <https://shadowGame.eu/en/homepage/>.

actions [...]. With video games, the work itself is material action. One *plays* a game”³. The digital storytelling and smartphone filmmaking with which the UCs narrate their journey in the first person hybridizes and mixes the forms of storytelling and gaming.

This article looks at the “fully rendered, actionable space”⁴ created by UCs to investigate new ways of representing yourself in the era of transmedia communication. After some theoretical remarks on the relationship between observation orders and forms of self-narration through audiovisual tools, the case study will be described, and the morphology and positioning of the participants will be analysed. The aim of this text is to move away from the traditional way of thinking by focusing on modes of participatory involvement more consistent with the video-gaming experience. A paradigm shift is here proposed: from a “dominant ‘ocularcentric’ aesthetic to a ‘haptic’ aesthetic rooted in embodied affectivity”⁵. In particular, three recurring narrative and positional strategies will be explored: the *situational map*, the *cinematic confession*, and the *haptic and phatic type*.

1. MOBILE SELF-REFLEXIVE FILMMAKING

Since around 2005, cell phone movies have been a topic of discussion among scholars, especially in the fields of documentary and experimental cinema. The terms that have been coined are many and represent an attempt to understand a rapidly spreading phenomenon: *first-person mobile films*, *mobile-mentaries*, *cellfilms*, *p-cinema*, etc. According to these studies, mobile filmmaking would privilege: 1) localised stories connected to a specific social environment⁶; 2) preference for the present tense over retrospective narration⁷; 3) an intimate and self-reflexive mode⁸; 4) engagement with the social environment, selecting fragments of everyday life through a first-person lens; and 5) a physical and “haptic” relationship with the medium, evident in its shooting style⁹. Even with claims to objectivity or witnessing, audiovisual material shot in the first person with cellphones easily produces an effect of alienation due to the change of perspective or the overlapping of different social and communicative contexts: “first person film goes beyond simply debunking documentary’s claim to objectivity. In the very awkward simultaneity of being subject in and subject of, it actually unsettles the dualism of objective/subjective divide, rendering it inoperative”¹⁰.

First-person mobile storytelling has the potential to create an empowering narrative where responsibility for truth lies in the viewer’s empathetic engagement with the material rather than in the documentary’s truth value. In particular, UCs use smartphone

³ A. Galloway, *Gaming Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵ C. Baker, M. Schleser, K. Molga, “Aesthetics of Mobile Media”, *Journal of Media Practice*, 10, 2-3 (2009): 101-122 (104).

⁶ R. Odin, “Question Posées à la théorie du cinéma par les films tour-nés sur téléphone portable”, in *Dall’inizio, alla fine. In the Very Beginning and the Very End. Film Theory in Perspective*, edited by F. Casetti, J. Gaines, V. Re, Udine: Film Form, 2009, 363-373.

⁷ M. Schleser, “Connecting through Mobile Autobiographies: Self-Reflexive Mobile Filmmaking, Self-Representation, and Selfies”, in *Mobile Media Making in an Age of Smartphones*, edited by M. Berry and M. Schleser, New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014, 148-158.

⁸ Baker, Schleser, Molga, “Aesthetics of Mobile Media”, 101.

⁹ R. Odin, “Question posées à la théorie du cinéma par les films tour-nés sur téléphone portable”, 363-373.

¹⁰ A. Lebow, ed., *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 5.

affordances to: a) maintain *strong ties* with country of origin, and b) establish new *weak ties* with people outside usual acquaintances, fostering a sense of proximity (*distant proximities*) that “make the loss and separation of exile just about bearable”¹¹. The UCs film with their smartphones not only to document the stages of their journey, but also to stay in touch with the transnational migrant network. This allows them to benefit from various resources (accreditation, social contacts, material and moral support). In other words, using smartphones and social media facilitates and expands coordination among multiple people, including those who are not family and friends¹².

UCs are always moving, so they have to use creative ways to film where they are. In these cases, we witness the creation of a *situational map*¹³. This map helps us to understand what has happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future. This situational map is constantly updated and remodeled by monitoring the present situation with tracking devices that identify the key points of the narrative and transcribe them on maps of different scales and orders, depending on how wide the range of events they include is. It is more important to look for UCs in the evidence for the project than to look at where they are. It is often impossible to identify them because of the ways in which they seek to stay hidden and move around. In other cases, the place is only a rough idea, to be understood as a point on a path or as something to get over.

This is why, for example, the narrative of migration is full of synecdoches, details that represent something larger and more articulated (e.g. the course of a river as an indication of the crossing of a border, the snowy and desolate park as an indication of northern Europe, etc.) (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 - *Before crossing the river. Still from “Shadow Game”*



¹¹ M. Gillespie, S. Osseiran, M. Cheesman, “Syrian Refugees and the Digital Passage to Europe: Smartphone Infrastructures and Affordances”, *Social Media+Society*, 4, 1 (2018): 1-12 (7). DOI: 10.1177/2056305118764440.

¹² R. Ling, C.-H. Lai, “Microcoordination 2.0: Social Coordination in the Age of Smartphones and Messaging Apps”, *Journal of Communication*, 66, 5 (2016): 834-856, DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12251.

¹³ T. Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

The second recurring form is the *cinematic confession* which, if “produced and exchanged in non-hegemonic contexts, can be powerful tools for self-understanding as well for the forging of human bonds and for the emotional recovery”¹⁴. If the first form is about space, the second is about place. Many definitions ignore the role of mobility in how the meaning of place is created. Mobility is a dynamic and relational process. But it is when we stop, at the end of a stage or when we are rejected, that we most often see this type of confession in films. In these cases, the cinematic confession can be seen in the tone (the way it looks and sounds thoughtful and reflective), the camera’s perspective (mostly fixed and seen from the bottom up), and the content (the way it demonstrates what happened and the search for motivation to move forward). Confessions made in films are often full of emotion and do not necessarily follow how events actually happened. Some confessions are made at the benefit of significant others or even just to oneself. They are stored in the smartphone’s memory and used when needed (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 - *A Confession*. Still from “*Shadow Game*”



The third relevant form is the *haptic dimension*. The search for contact with an interlocutor using the body as a mediator of communication is the specificity of this form. In *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game*, video messages are recorded and sent to family members to reassure, friends to brag or vent, other migrants to inform, and so on. Each of these forms of contact modifies the protagonists’ positioning and the film’s narrative. In each of these cases, the staging is open. As the main characters in *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game* openly admit, people often hide their true feelings when taking selfies. The UCs analysed endeavour to present themselves as determined and courageous, never showing signs of surrender. Such portrayals are intended to encourage others and to reinforce collective resilience in difficult circumstances. This performative stance be-

¹⁴ M. Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004, 215.

comes particularly evident at specific moments in the films, where previously recorded messages are revealed. The result is a constant mix of stage and backstage, where it's hard to say for sure what is real and what is imagined: is it the present or the past? This helps us to think about our own views and those of other people, providing insights into the biases, blind spots, and assumptions that influence how reality is perceived and constructed. In the end, these different ways of thinking shape an *ontological narrative* in which “[...] agents adjust stories to fit their own identities, and, conversely, they will tailor ‘reality’ to fit their stories. The intersubjective webs of relationality sustain and transform narratives over time”¹⁵.

The narrative of displacement, the narrative of the self, and the relational narrative are thus linked by the same ontological matrix: the migratory journey is also a path of formation, a coming-of-age that coincides with the realization of a mission. Instead, one can speak of an “agentic self-constituted around medial practice, or of a subjective space that fuses the subject and the object of the gaze”¹⁶. The playful and partly fairy-tale framework may be the best way to understand the UC’s self-representations. The game is a way to describe the different stages of the migration movement. It also demonstrates the transmedia narrative told by the UCs on their personal devices. These devices are designed to be interactive and relational, so much so that even the idea of autobiography or autoethnography is challenged. With reference to Bruss’s studies, Cati and Grassilli remind us that cinema has a controversial relationship with autobiography because:

Does not allow to be at the same time in front and behind the objective – that is, being the observer and the observed at once. Secondly, in the autobiographical process, subjectivity does not use the language as a medium to express its own capacity for self-observation and first-person consciousness, rather it takes shape as a performance or an action, through which – by narrating – the “I” indicates him/herself as the subject of the act of speaking and designates the subject of the sentence that is spoken at once¹⁷.

Precisely for these reasons, we should shift our gaze to participatory, transmedia, and processual forms such as gaming, rather than cinema, as the paradigm for analyzing UCs self-representations.

2. “SHADOW GAME” AND “MIND GAME”

I don’t know exactly why they call it the Game, but I think it must be like a goal, where when you’re playing a Game, you level up, and every time you do something you go to another level. It’s the same thing for us, that every country we cross is like a new level¹⁸.

Many refugees along the Balkan route refer to their attempts to cross the EU border informally – by walking through forests, crossing rivers, climbing fences, jumping

¹⁵ M. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach”, *Theory and Society*, 23, 5 (1994): 605-649 (618).

¹⁶ A. Cati, M. Grassilli, “The Migrant as an Eye/I. Transculturality, Self-Representation, Audiovisual Practices”, *Cinergie – Il cinema e le altre arti*, 8, 16 (2019): 1-11 (4).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸ Interview with Fahim, Afghanistan, Male, 22, former Krnjača Camp resident. C. Minca, J. Collins, “The Game: Or, ‘The Making of Migration’ along the Balkan Route”, *Political Geography*, 91 (2021): 1-21.

trains, hiding in trucks, or using smugglers to arrange taxi services – as “The Game”, a term also used by humanitarian organisations, authorities, and camp managers in the region. A lot of different people are involved in the “making of the game”. These include smugglers and their associates¹⁹, local camp authorities, and humanitarian and civil society organisations²⁰. The game is based on a specific informal geography. This is made up of information that travels through social media, smuggling networks, refugee camps, and informal routes across the region’s mountains, rivers, and fields. The game also shows how proud the refugees are of themselves. They are determined to succeed in crossing the border and to survive when they are pushed back. This is in preparation for the next attempt. The Game is a spatial tactic that the refugees have used to deal with and discuss the fact that it is not possible for them to travel to their desired destinations in a legal way. Dividing the migratory journey into gameplay actions that must be overcome to advance to the next level echoes the classic dynamics of sequential videogames. In these games, you can only get to the second level if you complete the first one, and so on. To complete a level, the player must achieve a goal. This could be finishing a stage, reaching a safe place or simply surviving. Each level crossing is like entering a different stage of the game, so you must change your approach. In some games, changing levels can also mean going back to the previous level or starting again. In roleplaying games, levelling up also refers to improving skills and developing a particular character. This is why there is a difference between levelling up to play and levelling up to character²¹. This double meaning demonstrates how two things are happening at the same time: the gaining of basic rights for migrants and the full recognition of migrants are linked to passing tests and entering contexts that are increasingly guaranteed. You can find out about the history of UCs and how they evolve from childhood to adulthood here.

Every day, every moment. Game, Game, Game. If you want to go to Europe, you have to play many Games. The Game means that you will have to cross the border illegally. There are different Games. The boat Game. The train Game. The container Game. The taxi Game [...] ²².

Shadow Game and *Mind Game* are two intimate “real-time” documentaries created by Flemish theatre collective SkaGeN and Dutch documentary filmmakers Eefje Blankevoort and Els van Driel, about Sajid Khan (hereafter SK), 15 years old from Afghanistan, and other UCs crossing the Balkan route (Fig. 3).

¹⁹ L. Achilli, “The ‘Good’ Smuggler: The Ethics and Morals of Human Smuggling among Syrians”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 676, 1 (2018): 77-96.

²⁰ Oxfam - *A Dangerous ‘Game’*, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-dangerous-game-pushback-migrants-refugees-060417-en_0.pdf.

²¹ D. Thomas, K. Orland, S. Steinberg, “Level”, in *The VideoGame Style Guide and Reference Manual*, Powerplay Publishing, 2007.

²² SK in: *Shadow Game*, min. 3:12.

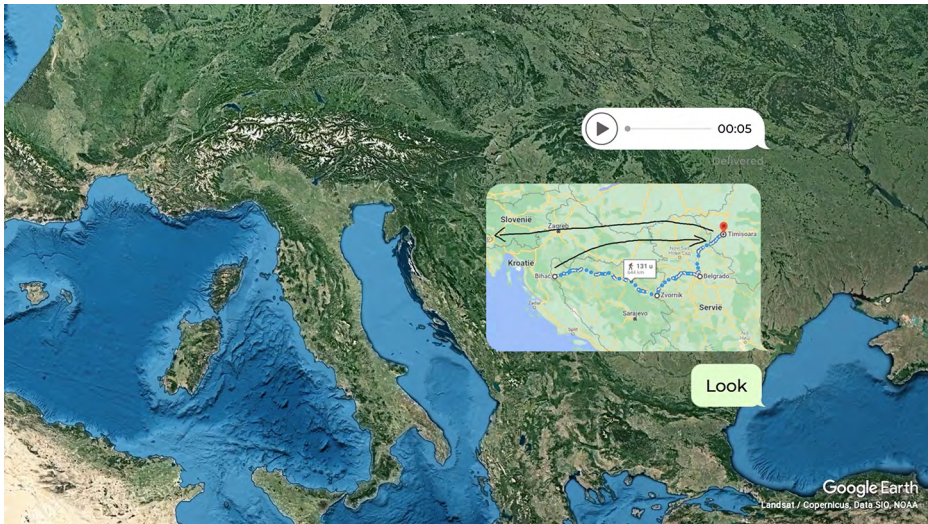
Figure 3 - *SK introduces himself. Still from “Shadow Game”*

In September 2019, filmmakers Eefje Blankevoort and Els van Driel met SK in Greece. SK was about to embark on a long and arduous journey across Europe. SK thus became one of the protagonists of the award-winning documentary *Shadow Game* (2021, Golden Calf, Prix Europa, Grand Geneva Award), which was followed a few years later by *Mind Game* (2023), which focuses on SK’s experience after its arrival in Europe. In the first film, the characters pass through barbed wire fences and borders to reach the “second level” alive. The second level represents asylum in Belgium and a fresh start instead of a game over. But even this level poses its own challenges, and this is what the second film focuses on (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 - *Filmmaking as advocacy. Still from “Mind Game”*

To track the entire migration path and document even the most hidden aspects, both directors rely on the same UC, all equipped with smartphones. As one of the directors explains in an interview: “phones were their lifeline, their gps, their lifeline with us”²³. The thousands of messages, videos and sound fragments that SK and the other UCs record and share with the directors between 2019 and 2022 have been used for these productions. *Mind Game* also incorporates animated Viber or WhatsApp conversations between UCs and the directors, while the entire mosaic of SK’s illegal journey through Europe was complemented by Google Earth and its virtual 3D representation of the Earth’s surface (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 - Mapping the route. Still from “Shadow Game”



The audience meets SK in a camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has been desperately trying to cross the border into Croatia for more than a year. Through forests, villages, across train tracks and rivers, we follow SK on his way. It’s a journey of hardship and disappointment, but also of growing commitment: SK meticulously documents what he sees. His goal was to share with the world what was happening on Europe’s borders.

From these methodological indications, one can consider *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game* as part of a broader, transmedia and partially open and interactive communicative and narrative process. Indeed, the two films serve as instruments to create an effect of continuity and sequence within multiple, diasporic, and sometimes contradictory communicative processes. For example, the two directors strongly encourage SK to record every important moment, dangerous situations, police checks, etc. to document the abuses, violations of rights and difficulties faced by the UC. On the other hand, SK says that he wants to seem positive and not be affected by problems. In *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game*, there is plenty of drama and sadness. But it is clear that the story of the Game

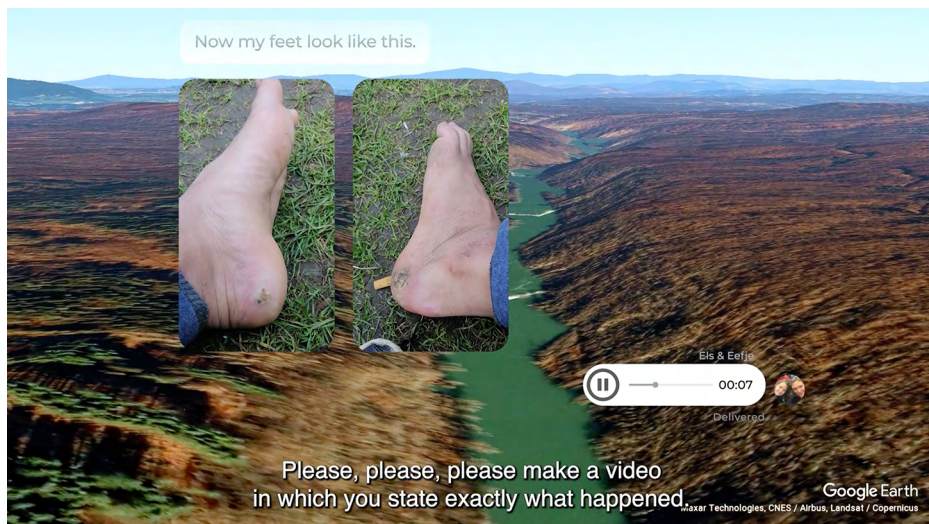
²³ “SHADOW GAME | Film Talk with Eefje Blankevoort, Els van Driel | 2021 @home”. Accessed September 5, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63hrv1POKtY>.

and the challenge of representation make it necessary to move beyond short-term problems, bad luck and accidents. As SK himself admits: “It was a Game on myself, I knew it was difficult, but you have to smile and to keep it positive” even if the one shown on camera “it was just a fake smile”²⁴. Moreover, the most important thing is to take cover in the difficult moments and to get the most out of the game, so not everything can be recorded. However, SK says that what he filmed is only a small part of what he and the other UCs lived and witnessed.

I wanted to film everything but you can't. When you are running for your life and the police are behind, you cannot film that. When the people are drawing in the river, you cannot film that. When the borders guards torture your friends, you cannot film that. The reality is even worse than what you see²⁵.

It is precisely in this absence, in the missing image, that the value of SK's and the other UC's choices or needs lie, as well as the difference between representation and first-hand experience. The two filmmakers' legitimate, and in many ways shared, need to gather documentary material for humanitarian and political purposes coincides with the need to visualize every backstage aspect of the migrant journey. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, this need is rooted in the obsession with continuous recording typical of certain cinema or investigative journalism based on “stacked evidence”. In this contradiction, we can see the risk of influencing UCs and pushing them to adopt an exaggerated narrative that focuses on the most sensational and shocking episodes (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 - *Forced to shoot? Still from “Shadow Game”*



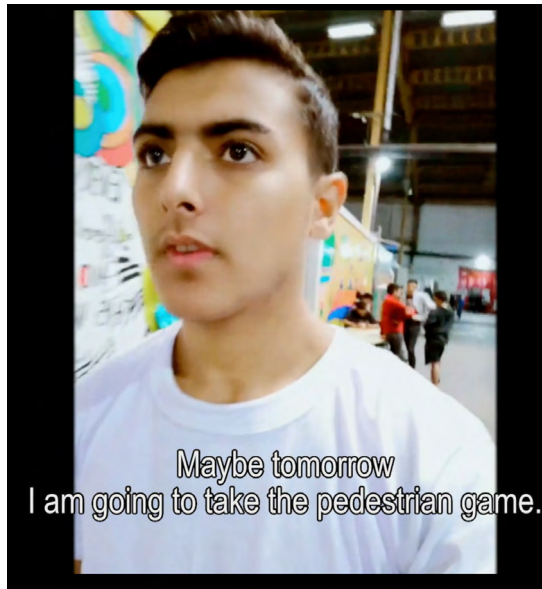
²⁴ SK in: *Mind Game*, min. 7:25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, min. 13.

3. MORPHOLOGY OF THE GAME

To understand the connection between storytelling and gaming, it's useful to look at Propp's influential study²⁶. In it, he explains the different roles and structures in fairy tales. In this work, 31 recurring elements are identified in the journey of the fairy-tale hero. These range from forced separation to completing the mission, from breaking a rule to facing enemies who try to control the hero's movements, from chases and escapes to rescues. These elements are like milestones on the path to success, which the hero must overcome to reach the final reward and achieve a new status. It is not possible to discuss each of these points in detail here, but it is important to note that almost all of them are very similar to the ways in which the migratory journey is told and acted out in *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game*, on the one hand, and the ways in which gaming is played at different levels, on the other (Fig. 7).

Figure 7 - *Different games and trials. Still from "Shadow Game"*



SK and the other UCs discuss their experiences of being forced to leave their loved ones and their home. The game is about achieving a goal for yourself and for your family and community. The game involves taking risks, like breaking the rules. This admission is not accompanied by feelings of guilt. On the contrary, it is accompanied by a feeling of courage and cunning. It is clear that the game is about fighting for freedom. Border control forces are bad guys that you have to avoid and get away from. So, UCs share tips and tricks with each other to help them. Some of these videos look like tutorials or how-to guides (Fig. 8).

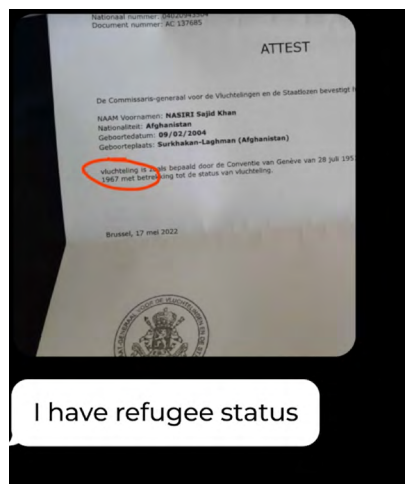
²⁶ V. Propp, *Morfologia della fiaba*, translated by G.L. Bravo, Torino: Einaudi, 2000 [1928].

Figure 8 - Like a tutorial. Still from “Shadow Game”



Movements are made covertly, with many strategies to hide or blend in. The aim of the game is to complete it to get a new identity or citizenship rights (Fig. 9).

Figure 9 - The final prize. Still from “Mind Game”



Travelling companions often play a key role. They become close collaborators and make strong friendships. The story of Waqas, who SK meets by chance during a phase of the game and who becomes his partner (“Waqas was a lot of fun... he became my best friend”), is a great example of how people represent themselves based on their relationships with others. When SK and Waqas stop talking to each other, he keeps talking about him and shows photos of them together. In the end, we learn from SK’s video that Waqas did not make it, and he left the Game in the most dramatic way possible by taking his own life after failing yet again (Fig. 10).

Figure 10 - *Waqas, my best friend. Still from “Shadow Game”*



4. POSITIONING AND POINT OF VIEW (POV)

The way the picture is taken and the way the people are positioned in it need to be considered separately. Again, video games rather than cinema offer interesting parallels for analyzing the POV of self-representations made with mobile phones. As Galloway states, the important thing is the connection between space and movement²⁷. If space in cinema is primarily a passive contemplation made dynamic by montage, space in Games must allow the character/player freedom of movement in space. This is why subjective framing works in Games. This combination is suggested, among others, by the scholar and media artist Harun Farocki, who has devoted a complex work (Parallel I-IV) to the relationship between visibility and Games, supported by a very thorough theoretical framework. On the basis of the concept of “actionable space”, Farocki argues that: “Truly subjective shots are quite rare and often very awkward in cinema. They’re sometimes used in altered states like drunken stupors or drug-induced hallucinations [...]. But in video games, the first-person point of view is very common”²⁸.

The link between the visual self-representation of UCs and gaming can thus also be extended to visuals and POV. In the context of video games, it is common to distinguish between three main POV:

²⁷ Galloway, *Gaming Essays on Algorithmic Culture*.

²⁸ H. Farocki in J. Almeida, P. Arantes, P. Moran, eds., *Harun Farocki: Programando o Visível*, São Paulo: São Paulo Pró-Reitoria de Cultura e Extensão Universitária: USP, 2017, 135.

1. The first-person POV, typical of shooters and role-playing games. This means that you can customize your character. In these cases, the main character is not directly visible but is perceived through the framing of the action and accompanying commentary. The camera is a real extension of the gaze. The point of view does not always line up with the center. In some games the viewfinder is moved slightly downward to increase the vertical space given to the scenery. Something similar can happen when filming certain moments of the migratory Game, where the perspective of the shot does not exactly match that of the protagonist, even though the action is still in the first person. This creates a hybrid and singular experience in which the perspective of the subject overlaps with that of the viewer, as happens with the player and the character he or she plays in the game (Fig. 11).

Figure 11 - *The hybrid first-person POV. Still from “Shadow Game”*



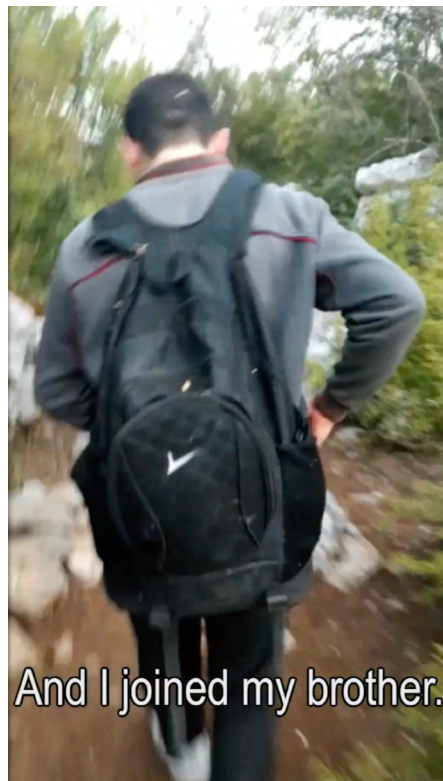
2. The second-person view is a new type of view in video games, which has also been made possible by virtual reality. The second person is when the main character, which is controlled by the player, is seen from the perspective of another player or object. SK gives his smartphone to someone else, like Waqas, to film him walking in the woods. In the video, SK talks about the problems he has when he is out in the woods. In moments of cinematic confession, SK positions the smartphone so that it can move around freely. This means that it is not controlled by the shot, which is usually filmed from the bottom up. When someone films themselves, this is called “vicarious self-representation”. This is when the person being filmed claims to be the person in the video, even though they were helped by someone else to make it or it was filmed from a fixed point (Fig. 12).

Figure 12 - *Second-person POV. Still from “Shadow Game”*



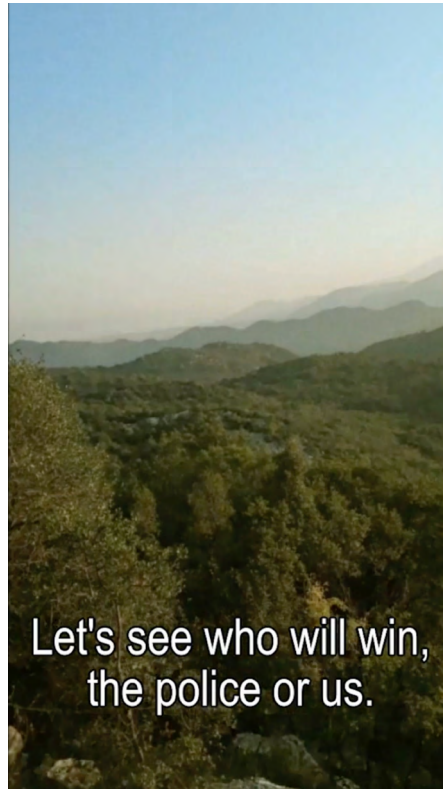
3. The third-person view is one of the most common ways to play video games. This type of camera has slowly replaced the fixed one because it allows the viewer to control the characters' movements and to communicate their feelings through their faces. One type of camera that is frequently used is the over-the-shoulder camera. The camera is free, but it is usually automatically positioned to the side or behind the subject. In SK filming, this perspective is used in the form of “stalking” other UCs on the move (Fig. 13).

Figure 13 - *Third-person POV. Still from “Shadow Game”*



4. Finally, axonometric or isometric perspective is worth mentioning. This is a form of orthogonal graphic representation in which the dimensions of the objects represented are not distorted by distance. This type of visualisation is not the same as how the human eye perceives things, which is characteristic of perspective views. An axonometric view is not realistic, but it is perfect for strategic video games because it helps you to accurately judge distances and dimensions. In *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game*, the inclusion and sharing of digital maps is like this view, as are the overhead shots of territories that have been crossed or are about to be crossed (Fig. 14).

Figure 14 - *Isometric POV. Still from "Shadow Game"*



5. FINAL REMARKS

In the two films analysed here, SK transforms from a generic UCs to a witness, then to an influencer and finally to an activist and director. In the end, SK describes himself as a protagonist of the Game alongside other players, but at the same time aspires to change the rules or at least influence its dynamics. The parable of SK and the other UCs in *Shadow Game* and *Mind Game* cannot be described as true autoethnography. The self-representation of SK demonstrates us an agentic self that is constituted around media practices and in relation to other agents/players on the one hand, and potential view-

ers on the other. Through this complex interactive intertwining, a “subjective space that merges the subject and object of the gaze” is created. It is an agentic self that does not interrupt its game and its narrative even when the goal of the journey has been achieved, as SK clearly demonstrates in *Mind Game*, because the need to tell one’s story and to take risks are fundamental acts that give meaning to a life’s journey. It is this continuous reference between agency and playful interaction that creates a unique form of media narrative participation that cannot be understood only through the traditional categories of audiovisual representation. This article seeks to provide some ideas for an approach that considers both transmedia storytelling and gaming. This mixed, multidimensional approach also reconfigures the roles and positions of migratory dynamics, abandoning a paternalistic view of migrants as passive subjects, in favor of a perspective that re-evaluates their visible and invisible agency²⁹.

²⁹ M. Ullrich, “Media Use During Escape. A Contribution to Refugees’ Collective Agency”, *Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures*, 4 (2017): 1-11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3854>.