

Chapter 11

The Home Console Dispositive: Digital Games and Gaming as Socio–Technical Arrangements

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the home console dispositive of the SONY Playstation in relation to digital games. The concept of the “dispositive” functions as a basis for the conceptualization of video games as an actor-network or a socio-technical arrangement respectively. This allows for an analysis and a description of various actors and their reciprocal relationships as well as the mutual process of fabrication of these actors in such video game networks. The historical development of the SONY Playstation system will serve as the primary example for these heterogeneous ensembles, whereby the main focus will be placed on one single-player game series, Grand Theft Auto, and one multiplayer game series, the soccer simulations of the FIFA series.

INTRODUCTION

Since the release of the supposed first video game¹*Tic-tac-toe* in 1958, (digital) games have undergone a remarkable change. In 1972, the company Magnavox introduced the game console Odyssey to the market, which was the first game console for domestic use. Its most popular game, *Pong*, prepared the ground for the establishment of digital games on the market (cf. Hauck, 2014, p. 10). About 40 years later, the game industry became one of the financially most successful representatives of entertainment business.² Besides economically interesting developments, the technical and aesthetical development of the last three decades of games, too, is highly remarkable/significant.

Pong and Crysis are separated by about 35 years of history of video games. However, the differences between the two games are as grave as the differences between cave paintings and realist paintings, which illustrates the progressive and lasting course this development has taken and which has conditioned the whole video game dispositive. (Felzmann, 2012, p. 198)

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This rapid development correlates with a rising number of game-consuming gamers.³ The increasing distribution and usage of games led to a broader attention in cultural discourses. Kai-Erik Trost (2014) notes the following:

Taken as a whole, video games, are by no means an eccentric phenomenon anymore and are not limited to children or juveniles, but as contemporary media, they instead have to be taken seriously - just as films or literature they need to be considered cultural phenomena. Rightly, in August 2008, the Bundesverband der Entwickler von Computerspielen [The Federal Organization of Video Game Developers] (G.A.M.E) were included as members of the Cultural Council – whereby video games officially were attributed the status of cultural assets. (p. 41)

At the beginning of the new millennium, and therefore prior to the official inclusion in the canonic circle of cultural assets, Game Studies emerged as a discipline of Media and Cultural Studies which addressed this new cultural phenomenon (cf. Bopp, Neitzel, & Nohr, 2005, p. 7). The conceptual and disciplinary vagueness mirrors the current methodological diversity of Game Studies. So far, the aesthetics and the visuality of games (cf. Beil, 2012), the (medial) presentation of respective contents (cf. Heuer, 2009) and the possibilities and perils of video game's virtual worlds (cf. Lober, 2007) have been analyzed and efforts have been made to subsume the heterogeneity of distinct approaches in the interdisciplinary field of "Game Studies" (see Freyermuth, 2015; Bopp, Neitzel, & Nohr, 2005). However, an analysis that takes into account the performative act of gaming, the specific practices that constitute the game as a whole and which have to be linked with its necessary periphery, is yet to be accomplished.

This paper will therefore discuss the arrangement of heterogeneous processes and technical devices, which occur and manifest in the very act of playing games, and describe and examine this arrangement as a dispositive. This analysis will focus on the dispositive established by game consoles and digital games. The heuristic distinction between personal computer gaming and console gaming mainly serves as a limitation and framing of the object of research with respect to the correspondent games and practices. Additionally, an analysis of the dispositive of video game consoles requires a distinct description of the gaming situation, which differs immensely from the gaming situation established by a personal computer dispositive.⁴ Prior to a description and analysis of the video game, a home console dispositive of digital games, the term "dispositive" will be discussed to specify the terms' definition and its use in this paper. This then is followed by a description and analysis of the video game console dispositive in relation to its spatial arrangement, technical configuration and gaming practices, as well as the shaping of the of the gamers themselves.

Consequently, the focus of this analysis will be the video game console dispositive, illustrated by the example of the SONY Playstation,⁵ in consideration of all techniques and actors involved in the process of establishing and configuring this dispositive as well as the reciprocal shaping of the gamer in the course of this process. I will mainly focus on the current generation of consoles, or rather the home console dispositive of the Playstation 4.

The main goal will be to describe the practices and processes of the home console dispositive as well as the effects that such practices have in the co-constitutive process of this very dispositive. In doing so, I will base my theoretical and methodological scope on the Actor-Network Theory approach, as spelled out by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon.

A good part of the chapter will deal with the location and the reciprocal shaping of the gamer by the dispositive and its reciprocal translational effects on the home console dispositive.

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