

# Games

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The principal contributions of games to globalization are military and commercial. Electronic games have sold internationally since the mid 1980s, from arcade play to handheld consoles to online subscriptions; from imaginary spheres of self-absorption to recruitment devices for the military. The overall market of US\$30 billion grew by 16 percent annually between 2006 and 2010. For its part, the US military, which underpins globalization, needs to recruit 80 000 new people a year in order to maintain world dominance. Difficult occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan during the 2001–2007 period jeopardized the steady supply of recruits, imperiling the army's stature as the nation's premier employer of workers aged 17–24. In response, video games interpellated the country's youth by situating their bodies and minds firing the same weapons and facing the same issues as in the real world, with TV commercials depicting soldiers directly addressing gamers and urging them to show their manliness by volunteering for the real thing and serving abroad to secure US power. Daily downloads in the early twenty-first century were at a rate of between ten and fifty thousand, and just under half of new recruits report having played prior to enlistment.

Gaming has been crucial to global war and vice versa since the late nineteenth century, when the US Naval War College Game simulated Prussian and French field tactics. Such methods gained popularity after remarkable success in predicting Japanese strategy in the Pacific from 1942. By the late 1950s, computers were utilized to theorize and play them. Game theory in 1960s and 1970s political science and warcraft sought to scientize the study and practice of crisis decision making, founded on

a rational-actor model of maximizing utility that was reapplied to the conduct of states, soldiers, and diplomats to construct nuclear-war prospects and counters. The Pentagon worked with Atari in the 1980s to develop *Battlezone*, an arcade game, for use as a flight simulator for fighter pilots, at the same time as it established a gaming center within the National Defense University. In the early 1990s, the end of the Cold War wrought economic havoc on many corporations involved in the US defense industry. These corporations turned to the games industry as a natural supplement to their principal customer, the military. Today's new geopolitical crisis sees these firms conducting half their games business with the private market and half with the Pentagon.

Games are cultural and commercial as well as militaristic. Consider *Food Force*, an advergame developed by the World Food Programme to highlight global hunger; MTV's *Darfur is Dying*, which drew 700 000 people online in a month; Serious Games Interactive's *Global Conflict: Palestine*, with a journalist protagonist seeking the truth amongst conflicting sources analyzing the conflict between Israel and Palestine; and *A Force More Powerful: The Game of Nonviolent Strategy*. And we must account for supposedly cybertarian environments, such as the *World Cyber Games* or *Second Life*. The latter is a massive multiplayer online game. These virtual worlds provide US\$1 billion revenue a year in the United States and Europe, and have seen Korea and China surpass Japan as key markets by contrast with the console sector, because companies there favor it as a counter to piracy. Originating primarily through freeware and extra-commercial organizations, they are being increasingly corporatized.

Since 2001, women have outnumbered men as participants in these necessarily social and collaborative enterprises.

Then there is the more venerable console sector. Half of all console games played across the globe are owned by three multinational corporations: Sony, Electronic Arts, and Nintendo. New consoles come on the market every half-decade to build in obsolescence and exclude new entrants. Since the original Sony PlayStation in 1995, the idea has been to preclude outsiders from creating programs for general use beyond a corporate platform – copying the model of the sealed-set transistor that turned radios into receiving rather than transmitting devices decades earlier. This has also led to rapid takeovers of small companies by the major firms. So one might argue that *Grand Theft Auto* was a neat instance of cultural appropriation, since this *ur-text* of US urban dross was actually created in Britain – but it was also a niche instance, since the business was quickly taken over by Yanqui capital. Independents must always look to the global market because most domestic ones are too slight to recoup investment in development and promotion.

Of course, the global impact of games does not end with producing or playing them. Games that are sold physically end up as recycling fodder, along with the materials they are played on. Sixteen-year-old girls leave villages in northern China to work in effectively indentured compounds run by Japanese, Taiwanese, and US businesses in the south to build computers used for games. Pre-teen Chinese girls pick away without protection at discarded first-world computers full of leaded glass in order to find precious metals, and then dump the remains in landfills. The metals are sold to recyclers, who do not use landfills or labor in the first world because of environmental and industrial legislation to prevent the destruction to soil, water, and workers that are caused by the dozens of poisonous

chemicals and gases in these dangerous machines. More than 130 000 personal computers a day are thrown out around the world, leading to millions of pounds of toxic waste. PlayStation consoles are illegal in many countries because of the deadly levels of cadmium contained in their cables. The relevant multinational corporations have denied responsibility for the post-consumption histories of their dangerous products. The United States has used the World Trade Organization to counter efforts at diminishing pollution from this equipment. Fortunately, the combination of European market power and Restriction of Hazardous Substances legislation, plus other mandates already in place, mean that even US firms specializing in hazardous computer parts must now adhere to strict safety standards in their components, if not their work practices.

SEE ALSO: Environmental problems; Media-scapes.

#### FURTHER READING

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