Theorizing Digital Games: Play Theories & New Materialism

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Matter is intrinsically continuous. It has no divisions in nature, so any division of matter into separate objects with absolutely determined boundaries is an artificial division. So, how do we divide the primordially perceived continuity of material extension into distinct objects, each with its own substance and individuality? First, we rediscover the real by looking for tangible outlines in matter and considering them as our practical limits. As our perception separates matter into independent outlines, our knowledge solidifies the continuous flow of objects into sensory qualities. Objects are then formed by the momentary divisions that the episteme makes within this kind of flow at any given moment. They then provide stable points to us in a constantly changing continuity. The fact that objects are the result of solidification influenced by our understanding implies that our reasoning is innately accustomed to matter. Therefore, our reasoning consistently succeeds with matter.[1]

For example, nature, which consists of chaotic, random, and unpredictable phenomena, makes it difficult to find natural laws. To be verified, natural phenomena must be shielded from all irrational disturbances, and be ordered, selected, filtered, purified, and shaped. This is achieved through the realization of an experimental reality using 'objects'. According to Bachelard, scientific observations must distance themselves from immediate observations that came from everyday experiences because they tend to contradict each other. Instead, scientific observations entail confirmations or deny of preceding theses, models, and protocols. This new type of observation relies on realized reason through experimentation. By reaching for the phenomena much more controlled than ordinary phenomena, experimentation aims to go beyond the immediate and recreate, demonstrate, and reconstruct reality. By sharing the experimental results with the world, we call for verification and realization of our recreation. By that, our world transforms into a scientific world, replacing chaos with order (kosmos). In other words, experiments verify and actualize order. In this process, instruments play a crucial role in producing controlled phenomena. They filter, purify, and shape the phenomena to be realized. As Bachelard described, instruments are theories materialized, and the phenomena they produce bear the influence of theory.[2]

The role of materiality in digital games resembles the role of instruments in experimentation. Just as instruments give us control over the chaos and recreate reality

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[1] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, (Macmillan Co, 1913).

[2] Gaston Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 13.

Proceedings of DiGRA 2023

on our own, the materiality of digital games helps players to do the same; select, filter, purify, and shape the chaos around them. In this context, my project seeks to develop a theoretical approach to studying digital games by revisiting the classic theories of Bergson and Bachelard and integrating their theories with contemporary perspectives. I aim to explore the relationship between the materiality of digital games and players as interconnected and mutually constitutive elements. Central to this endeavor is the concept of digital games as materialized play. Rather than viewing games solely as intangible experiences, the project aims to explore the material aspects inherent in digital games. To achieve this goal, I would like to interrogate how we can study digital games through the lens of new materialism. In this way, I expect to center digital games in theoretical studies.

Keywords

Play theory, New materialism, Digital games

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