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Gaming the Revolution: Theodor Adorno As Art Critic of the Digital Commons

A specter haunts 21st century aesthetics, from its biggest franchise blockbusters to its most specialized aesthetic theory – the specter of the digital commons. All the media powers of neoliberalism have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: News Corp. and the RIAA, the US Chamber of Commerce and Hollywood studios, Disney executives and Wall Street banksters.[1] Where is the practice of the digital commons, ranging from democratic file-sharing to open source production, that has not been denounced as intellectual property theft by greedy media oligopolies? Where is the national broadcasting system that has not been hijacked by neoliberal plutocrats and corporate privatization, at the expense of the public interest?[2]

Two conclusions need to be drawn from these facts. First, the digital commons is acknowledged by all of these powers to be itself a power. Second, it is high time that we digital commoners – there are two billion of us online in 2013, a number which will grow to four or five billion by 2018[3] – should openly, in the face of the whole world, broadcast the views, aims, and tendencies of the commons, and confront neoliberalism's nursery-tale of media piracy with our very own manifesto.

This is not that manifesto, for the simple reason that someone else wrote it first. Surprising as it sounds, this manifesto was not written in the 2000s, nor in the 1990s, nor even the 1980s. It was written in 1966, at a time when advanced computing technology meant mini-computers such as Hewlett-Packard's 2116A, released in November of that year with 4 kilobytes of memory (by comparison, the average 2012 cellphone had 256 megabytes, sixty-five thousand times bigger).[4]

Most surprising of all, this manifesto was not written in the form of a list of political demands. Rather, it took the more rarefied form of a document of art criticism. The text in question is *Negative Dialectics*, and its author was Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno.

This is a deeply scandalous assertion, for a number of reasons. To begin with, Adorno has been largely consigned to the intellectual margins by mainstream academia and by most culture-workers during the past forty years. Mostly, he is regarded as a defeatist snob who said some interesting, albeit snobby and defeatist, things about the mid-20th century European modernisms.[5] Very few contemporary thinkers have grasped the potential of Adorno's critique of the total system as a means of critiquing neoliberalism – surely the most total system that capitalism has yet devised. While it is true that leading academic dissidents such as Fredric Jameson have acknowledged Adorno's 1947 *Minima Moralia* as being one of the first great explorations of 20th century identity-politics, Adorno's later work has simply not received the critical attention it deserves.[6] To my knowledge, nobody has yet drawn the connections between Adorno's art criticism, and the critique of today's leading digital artists and videogame franchises, a.k.a. digital art criticism.

There are three main reasons for this epic failure of reception. First of all, the official English translation of *Negative Dialectics* is deeply flawed, to the point of being unusable. Since English is the leading language of global translation, this also made the text inaccessible to postcolonial scholars, activists and social movements – precisely the audience which experienced

the fullest brunt of the violence of neoliberal immiseration. This is a difficulty I have personally tried to ameliorate through my own original English-language translations of key works of Adorno, freely available online.[7]

Secondly, Adorno's final and most prodigious text was ahead of its time. *Negative Dialectics* was a critique whose true object had yet to fully emerge on the stage of world-history: the system called neoliberalism. In case readers are unfamiliar with this term, neoliberalism is the ideology of transnational market fundamentalism, a.k.a. the rule of the plutocrats who ran roughshod over the world economy from the mid-1970s until the mid-2000s.[8]

Even assuming an adequate translation is at hand, Adorno is challenging to read, but not because his work consists of dusty, dry theory. Rather, the challenge lies in the extraordinary precision and power of his concepts. Each functions as a springboard of meaning, which catapults the reader to other concepts in its vicinity, thereby creating larger networks of meaning. These networks never bog down in cliche or jargon, but are in constant motion, and call up still other, more distant networks of meaning. If this sounds suspiciously similar to the way internet hyperlinks and open-access digital networks operate, this is *exactly* how Adorno thinks – which may help to explain why it took so long for his work to be properly appreciated.

There is a third reason for Adorno's delayed reception, which is biographical in nature. The single most innovative media theorist associated with the Frankfurt School, namely Walter Benjamin, perished in 1940.[9] Benjamin's 1936 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility*, was a ground-breaking theory of the epoch of silent and early sound cinema (the 1910s to the 1930s) which remains a touchstone of contemporary media and cultural studies.[10] With Benjamin's passing, Adorno lost more than just one of his dearest friends. He lost the one theorist who could think on his own level – the crucial counterplayer, to borrow Erik Erikson's suggestive term, who could have answered for Adorno's theoretical innovations with new forms of media critique.[11]

The net result of these three factors was that Adorno's greatest work lay hidden for decades, like some alien artifact frozen in the tundra. Indeed, it was not until the final phase of the neoliberal era that the excavation and reactivation of that artifact became an urgent priority. The reason for this urgency is the remarkable paradox at the heart of neoliberalism. This paradox is that whereas neoliberal policies ushered in unprecedented wealth polarization and elite plunder, those same policies also unwittingly ushered in new forms of cultural, social and political democratization. The key engine of this democratization is what Yochai Benkler has called the digital commons, namely the sum total of the non-commercial production, distribution and consumption of information, science, knowledge and media.[12]

The digital commons was the crucial precondition for the twin geopolitical detonations called the Occupy movements and the Arab Spring – the movements which pulverized the legitimacy of Wall Street neoliberalism, and the legitimacy of neoliberal autocracies all across northern Africa and the Middle East, respectively. In the cultural realm, the digital commons has dramatically transformed how music, literature, television, cinema, video, comics, poetry and videogames are produced and distributed. All of this has incalculable consequences for the social vocation of art criticism.

What makes Adorno's work invaluable today is that it gives us a powerful set of tools to map the digital commons and thereby understand digital aesthetics. These tools allow us to grasp aesthetics as a totality of multiple material histories, ranging from the production of individual works of art to the institutions of aesthetic reception and experience (everything from the most mundane consumerism to the artistic epiphany), all the way to the critical subjectivities of artists

and audiences, all at once. Adorno's point is that if you leave out any single one of these histories, your analysis falls back into provincialism and untruth. However, if you bring all of these histories together, then the analysis can generate the energy necessary to unlock the historical potential bound up in the work of art, the aesthetic experience, or the critical subjectivity in question.

To make a long story short, Adorno's argument is that aesthetics is accessible to human beings solely through the collective labor of interpretation (yes, Adorno is channeling Marx's notion of here). A truly democratic society would respect all forms of cultural and interpretive labor, and enable all of its citizens to become autonomous producers and critical consumers of art. Conversely, the hallmark of all repressive, unfree societies is the monopolization, commodification or enchaining of cultural and interpretive labor for the benefit of predatory elites. In the language of today's videogames, where neoliberal media oligopolies want to dumb their audiences down, Adorno wants audiences to level themselves up.

To see the power of Adorno's thought, let's take a closer look at three of the key concepts of *Negative Dialectics*. These concepts are the constellation, the bane (a.k.a. baleful spell) of the totality, and the preponderance of the object.

1. *The constellation*. The constellation, a.k.a. the transnational ensemble, is roughly analogous to what anthropologists call the assemblage, what literary theorists define as intertextuality, and what historians call historicity.[13] The constellation is not a static or fixed set of relations, but a provisional cast or throw, whereby a disparate set of events, narratives or social phenomena can be grasped from a larger transnational framework. The purpose of this framework is not to dissolve those phenomena into a single explanatory or master narrative, but to allow us to understand their collective logic.[14]

One of the most important examples of a constellation is the internet-based videogame commons. Half of this commons consists of the institutions and practices of fan communities, which are beginning to take over the gatekeeping functions of reception and criticism from paid journalists and commercial advertisers. Currently, the phenomenon of fan labor is revolutionizing the process of game production, everywhere from the spread of player-created game modifications or "mods", to the proliferation of multiplayer and cooperative forms of game-play, all the way to in-game trophies and achievements earned by player actions. The other half of this commons consists of the non-commercial institutions and practices of commercial game studios and their employees. Some of the most successful videogame studios in the world – examples include Valve, Sony's Naughty Dog and Santa Monica studios, and Konami's Kojima Productions – operate as egalitarian, cooperative teams with few formal hierarchies, and which genuinely respect the creativity and labor of their fan communities.[15]

It was the collective constellation of fan communities and digital artists which transformed videogames into one of the most popular and democratic art-forms of the 21st century. One of the best examples is Sony Santa Monica's *God of War* franchise, which retells ancient Greek mythology from the standpoint of the transnational neo-slave narrative. The talented digital artists of the Santa Monica studio worked closely with a transnational network of other Sony studios as well as first-party partners, in order to extract the best possible performance from the Playstation 3's multicore computer architecture.[16] The franchise also relied heavily on democratic forms of cooperation with literally hundreds of skilled culture-workers.[17]

Yet what transformed a solid franchise into a touchstone of innovation was its engagement with the fan community. For example, Sony Santa Monica artist Andy Park began posting samples of his *God of War* artwork on a fan website as early as 2007. These are examples

of "concept art", pictures which provide an aesthetic reference point for the work of the game programmers and designers. This is a form of sharing typically prohibited by film or television studios, in order to maximize profits by selling franchise-based coffee table books, posters, calendars and the like. However, Park puts no restrictions or limits on copying these image files, and Sony Santa Monica has pursued a policy of encouraging fans to share and disseminate concept art.[18]

The combined effect of these multiple forms of democratization was to create one of the most compelling, entertaining, and politically astute action videogame franchises of all time. Unlike nearly all other film and television franchises, which transform the ancient Greek myths into apologetics of past and present empires, the *God of War* franchise is ferociously critical of empire and imperial war.

2. *The bane.* The baleful spell or bane of the totality, one of Adorno's most famous innovations, is also one of the most useful to critique neoliberalism.[19] We mentioned previously that from the mid-1970s until the mid-2000s, the plutocracy – a loose alliance of the financial elites of the industrialized nations, and the aspiring oligarchs of the industrializing nations – went on world history's biggest looting spree. A tiny group of oligarchs got richer, and everyone else got poorer.[20] Even worse, instead of funneling savings into productive investment, the plutocrats starved the real economy in favor of far more lucrative financial bubbles. Needless to say, these bubbles invariably imploded, leaving misery in their wake.[21]

David McNally has noted that many of the most popular media narratives of the neoliberal era, ranging from the occult horror thriller to the zombie apocalypse, are allegories of the violence of Wall Street market fundamentalism. These narratives document the bane in the form of zombies which consume erstwhile consumers, or occult monsters which take over the bodies and minds of their erstwhile producers.[22]

Adorno's contribution here is to enable us to understand how digital artists can do more than simply document the violence of the market, they can also mobilize against the bane. While the mainstream film, radio, and television broadcasting industries were largely complicit with neoliberalism, due to their dependence on advertising revenue and oligopoly strategies to control media content, there were certain groups of artists who resisted the bane from the very beginning. The most prominent examples are hip hop musicians, independent cartoonists and animators, and videogame artists.

These latter were able to resist because they are structured as digital networks tied to the final demand of consumers, rather than as corporate oligopolies tied to advertising revenues. Where television broadcasters rely on content pipelines designed to maximize advertising revenues, hip hop musicians rely on ticket sales to live concerts, cartoonists and animators rely on the distribution networks of comics fans (e.g. Japan's anime and manga fan communities), and videogame studios rely on sales to digital consumers.

Videogame artists had one additional advantage which the artists of Adorno's era did not enjoy. This is the fact that interactive digital media rely on active audience participation. This participation tends to encourage long-term replayability and innovation, and to discourage short-term profiteering. This interactivity helps to explain the persistent failure of attempts to introduce television-style ads or advergaming inside game-worlds. This comparative autonomy from advertising revenues, combined with the loyalty of fan communities, is what allowed blockbuster videogame franchises such as Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear* series to shatter neoliberalism's bane. Indeed, Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 4* (2008) delivers a scathing critique of neoliberalism's commercial monopolies over genetic engineering, journalism, and military technology,

something no blockbuster film or television franchise has ever dared to do.

3. *The preponderance of the object*. Last but not least, there is Adorno's "preponderance of the object".[23] This is essentially Adorno's updating of Marx's concept of 19th century commodity fetishism, in order to account for the specific features of 20th century consumerism. In a famous passage, Marx wrote about how capitalism transformed an ordinary table into a commodity, an abstract social relation which was antagonistic to its producers.[24] Where Marx pointed out that the leading commodities of Victorian-era Britain – textiles, coal, and iron – were structurally rooted in brutal and merciless exploitation of workers, Adorno argues that the staple consumer goods of the mid-20th century, e.g. automobiles, electric fans, radio receivers – are structurally rooted in oligopoly domination and repressive consumerism. Instead of simply extracting labor-time from workers during working hours, US monopoly capitalism transformed the free time of its employees into capital-generating consumerism. The preponderance of the object thus broadens the critique of workplace exploitation to include the ways that capitalism exploits our leisure time, transforming the human desire for creativity and self-expression into a mechanism of hucksterism and stupefaction.

The relevance of Adorno's concept is easiest to grasp in terms of the preponderance of the digital, a.k.a. the transnational commodities which have succeeded the textile fabrics of the 19th century as well as the consumer appliances of the 20th century. The preponderance of the digital enables us to understand the otherwise inconceivably complex proliferation of hardware, software, platforms and networks as forms of embodied labor, which confront their creators in the same antagonistic way which textile commodities confronted 19th century mill workers.

Nor does the critique of the digital commodity stop at the level of form, a.k.a. the power of transnational financial markets or neoliberal corporations. Rather, it drives towards what Adorno would term the concrete negation of transnational capitalism. This is nothing less than the category of transnational labor, without which that capital could not exist (remember, capital is socially embodied labor). The importance of the digital commons is that it is one of the first expressions of the collectivity of transnational labor, a.k.a. the consciousness of the five billion working people of planet Earth.[25]

In this largest of perspectives, Adorno's concepts are to the digital commons what fan labor is to videogame culture, or what open source software is to computer platforms. The former do not arrogate or suborn the content of the latter. Rather, they are the indispensable set of mediations which enable users to democratically access all other mediations.

Put more concretely, transnational cultural labor is the key engine of the democratization of videogame culture. It is worth pointing out that prior to the digital era, mass audiences waged mostly local struggles against media oligopolies, everywhere from the independent artists located at the margins of the Hollywood studio system, to the small-scale networks of informal media production and distribution ("samizdat") which have always existed inside even the most repressive one-party states. These audiences could dissent from the mainstream, but did not have the means to overturn its hegemony.

By contrast, today's transnational labor mobilizations are doing more than merely resisting the copyright fundamentalism of the transnational media corporations. A constellation of fans, players and digital artists has fundamentally transformed the field of aesthetic production. Distribution systems are changing, thanks to the flourishing of non-commercial file-sharing throughout the industrializing nations, as well as the stinging defeat of plutocrat-inspired US legislation such as SOPA and PIPA. Meanwhile, videogame fans and studios are building game-worlds which are increasingly autonomous from commercial media monopolies, and

which give players an ever-increasing variety of tools to become aesthetic producers and critics in their own right.

This process is especially advanced in the realm of videogame reception, where fan networks have almost completely supplanted the taste-making functions of advertiser-funded commercial videogame journalism and commercial advertising campaigns. Far from resisting this change, the vast majority of videogame studios understand that whatever loss of control they may experience over their marketing campaign will be more than adequately compensated for by increased fan goodwill. In a telling example of what Adorno forecast as the self-unraveling of the bane, these studios responded to their fans by democratizing their publicity and outreach campaigns.[26]

One of the best examples of this unraveling can be credited to Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear* series. Kojima's studio released several game trailers from 2005 to 2007 in order to promote the 2008 release of *Metal Gear Solid 4*. These trailers can be considered works of art in their own right, and offered compelling showcases of in-game cut-scenes and game-play without revealing any plot points or spoiling the storyline. However, these trailers were not released as paid advertisements on commercial broadcasting networks. They were first aired to audiences at leading game conferences such as the Tokyo Game Show or GamesCom, and then released to the public on free-to-view video-sharing sites.

That said, the year 2008 marks a true watershed in the unraveling of neoliberalism's bane. This was the moment fan labor (what the industry calls "user-generated content") became a mainstream feature of the videogame industry. This occurred when Media Molecule (an independent studio at the time, subsequently acquired by Sony in a friendly buyout), released *Little Big Planet*. This latter was a charming platformer-style game, where players ran, jumped and moved objects in a mostly two-dimensional game-world. What set it apart from all other platformers was that the game came packaged with a powerful set of easy-to-use creative tools. These tools allowed fans with no prior programming or computing skills to build their own custom levels (i.e. democratized fan labor) and then collectively share, play through, and rate these levels online, as part of *Little Big Planet*'s custom-built social media network.[27] The result was an explosion of online creativity, as fans took the design tools and found creative uses for them which Media Molecule's own staffers could not have imagined. The commercial success of the *Little Big Planet* franchise, which sold 10.9 million copies from 2008 to the end of 2012, showed that the digital commons can be enormously productive, even where it is structurally bounded by the dictates of digital commerce.[28]

More recently, Markus Persson's *Minecraft* franchise took the next logical step, by removing some of the constraints of digital commerce from the videogame development process. Persson created and distributed *Minecraft* for free, and only later created a commercial company, Mojang, in order to serve as the customer service, testing, research and development center of the *Minecraft* gaming commons. In turn, the vast community of users who downloaded free versions of the game before its official release went on to purchase 8.8 million official copies of the game in various formats since its release (personal computers, videogame consoles and mobile devices).[29]

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Adorno is the necessity of thinking systematically about the social meaning of art. By thinking systematically, Adorno does not mean a systemized or routined thinking, but rather a thinking willing to grasp the largest of sociological contradictions in the smallest of micrological details – and thereby turn the power of the system against itself.

What this means is that in order to think transnationally, we must be willing to read our digital game-worlds as more than just digital playgrounds. They are also documents of transnational history, and social spaces where planetary networks of artists, fans and players are reappropriating the digital tools and networks previously monopolized by the planet's biggest media corporations and most unscrupulous plutocrats. They are laboratories of our digital future, the commons where the innumerable resistances to neoliberalism are converging.

Where neoliberalism gamed the system to enrich the few while impoverishing the many, the uprising against neoliberalism systemizes its games to defend the collectivity. That uprising must reappropriate the hegemony of transnational capital over the digital commodity, dissolving such back into the collectivity from whence it came. At its furthest limit, Adorno's negative dialectics radiates with the potential of a world emancipated from market predation, a world free not just to play, but to collectively build, dream, and create anew.

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1. These first two paragraphs are homage to the opening of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, available online. Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto.* Accessed December 20, 2012. http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm.

2. For further explorations of the relevance of Marx's critique to today's digital media, see: Dan Schiller. *Digital Capitalism*. Boston: MIT Press, 1999. Nick Dyer-Witheford. *Cyber-Marx*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

3. This is national data compiled by the Internet Statistics website. Internet Statistics. Accessed December 20, 2012. http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.

4. The HP2116A was ground-breaking because it was a true general-purpose computer, rather than a specialized digital measurement device. Leslie Goff, "1966: HP's radical move," *CNN*, July 6, 1999. Accessed December 20, 2012. http://edition.cnn.com/TECH/computing/9907/06/1966.idg/.

5. Specifically, Adorno has been duly credited for his defense of certain mid-20th century European modernisms, e.g. the twelve-tone music of Berg, Webern and Schönberg, the dramaturgic innovations of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, and the visual modernism of Paul Klee.

6. That said, enormous credit is due to Fredric Jameson for popularizing Adorno's work to a North American audience in his *Marxism and Form.* This text introduced the Frankfurt School to an entire generation of scholars and critics. Fredric Jameson. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971. Fredric Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno, Or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 1990.

7. For my new, original translation of the culture industry chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry". In: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/CultureIndustry.pdf. For my original translation of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, see: Theodor Adorno. *Minima Moralia*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/MinimaMoralia_Full.pdf. For my original translation of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics,* see: Theodor Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf. These translations grew out of the PhD dissertation I wrote on Theodor Adorno in 2000, for the Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon.

8. The best single account of the Wall Street bubble was written by Nomi Prins. See: Nomi Prins. *It Takes A Pillage: An Epic Tale of Power, Deceit, and Untold Trillions*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2009. The best economic critiques of neoliberalism have been written by Ha-Joon Chang, Joseph Stiglitz and Yanis Varoufakis. Chang's *Bad Samaritans* demolishes the neoliberal myth of perfectly free trade, Stiglitz' *Freefall* debunks the neoliberal myth of perfectly efficient markets, while Varoufakis' *The Global Minotaur* shows how the geopolitical foundations which made neoliberalism hegemonic have been slowly but irresistibly disintegrating from within over the past three decades. Ha-Joon Chang. *Bad Samaritans: the Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008. Joseph Stiglitz. *Freefall: America, Free Markets and the Sinking of the World Economy.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010. Yanis Varoufakis. *The Global Minotaur: America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy.* London: Zed Books, 2011.

9. In 1940, Benjamin and a group of refugees were arrested by the border authorities while attempting to cross the French-Spanish border. Convinced he would be handed over to the Gestapo, he chose to

take his own life. When Adorno writes about the guilt of survivorhood late in *Negative Dialectics* (the exact passage is in the "Metaphysics and Culture" section of "Part III, Models: Meditations on Metaphysics"), the primary referent is to the Nazi genocides of WW II, but the emotional charge of the passage is unmistakable homage to Benjamin.

10. My original translation of Benjamin's essay is available online at: Walter Benjamin. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973. Accessed December 22, 2012. http://monkeybear.info/ReproducibilityTrans.html.

11. We will never know what concepts Benjamin would have dreamed up in the environs of US of the 1940s, with its Marx Brothers movies, New Deal public arts programs, the jazz modernisms of Charlie Parker and Count Basie, and vocal artists such as Paul Robeson and Odetta. At the very least, Benjamin's affinity to Surrealism and Cubism might have enabled him to grasp the productivities of the US literary, musical and cinematic modernisms, especially their African American incarnations, in ways which would not occur until the rise of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Given Benjamin's predilection for Spain, it is possible to imagine him settling in Mexico City as one of the occasional guests of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and writing disquisitions on the church paintings of New Spain, Billy Wilder films, and Nahuatl mythology.

12. Yochai Benkler (2003). "The Political Economy of Commons." *Upgrade 4*:3 (6-9). Accessed October 31, 2010. http://www.benkler.org/Upgrade-Novatica%20Commons.pdf.

13. "The unifying moment survives, without the negation of the negation, yet also without delivering itself to the abstraction as the highest principle, not by advancing step by step towards the general master-concept from the concepts, but by these latter entering into a constellation. These illuminate the specifics of the object which the classifying procedure is indifferent towards or uncomfortable with. The model for this is the conduct of language. It offers no mere sign-system for cognitive functions. Where it appears essentially as language, becoming portrayal [Darstellung], it does not define its concepts. It obtains their objectivity through the relationship in which it posits the concepts, centered around a thing. It thereby serves the intention of the concept, to wholly express what is meant. Solely constellations represent, from without, what the concept has cut away from within, the 'more', which the former wishes to be, so very much as it cannot be the latter. By gathering around the thing to be cognized, the concepts potentially determine its innermost core, thinking to attain what thinking necessarily stamped out of itself." Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973 (164). Translated by Dennis Redmond. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf.

14. Constellations can be political and social as well as cultural. One of the best examples of a political constellation is the Arab Spring. Since 2011, the majority of the Arab-speaking nations of the Middle East and North Africa have experienced an unprecedented wave of political contestation and transformation. While each nation experienced its own unique form of mass mobilization, each mobilization was interconnected in ways great and small with all others. The people of Tunisia and Bahrain invented new forms of civic and cultural mobilization, the people of Egypt and Yemen invented new types of cross-class, cross-sectarian, and urban-rural coalitions, the people of Libya invented new forms of diasporic and interethnic solidarity (e.g. acknowledging their Amazigh population), the people of Syria invented new forms of citizen journalism and guerilla warfare against a murderous dictatorship, etc. Despite their local differences, all the revolutions shared the same features of the mass reappropriation of national symbols and spaces, the proliferation of independent media production via citizen journalism and non-commercial media networks, and the mass participation of

young people and especially young women. While the Arab Spring is still an ongoing process, some of the best theoretical analysis of the various movements has been created by citizen journalists on websites such as Jadaliyya: Jadaliyya. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://www.jadaliyya.com/.

15. These cooperative structures are not an epiphenomenon, but are flourishing in the most heavily capitalized sectors of the industry. The clearest description of how such cooperative studios function is Valve's handbook for new employees, available online at: Valve Software. Accessed January 31, 2013. http://www.valvesoftware.com/company/Valve_Handbook_LowRes.pdf.

16. In a presentation for the 2009 Game Developers' Conference, two of the lead programmers for *God of War 3*, Jim Tilander and Vassili Filippov, emphasized the importance of a library of software called SDK library EDGE. The acronym "SDK" stands for "software development kit", and refers to the software tools which are used to build other, more specialized tools. The EDGE library is a body of optimized code created by the joint efforts of Sony's worldwide studio network, in order to facilitate videogame production for the entire studio network. Jim Tilander and Vssili Filippove, presentation (34-35). Tilander.org. Accessed September 15, 2010. www.tilander.org/aurora/comp/gdc2009_Tilander_Filippov_SPU.pdf.

17. *God of War 3* required the combined efforts of 638 artists, designers and technicians: Internet Movie Database. Accessed November 1, 2010. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1199781/fullcredits#cast. It is worth noting that numbers are broadly representative of so-called AAA or top-tier titles in the videogame industry. For example, Hideo Kojima's best-selling videogame *Metal Gear Solid 4* (2008) was created by a crew of 496: Internet Movie Database. Accessed November 1, 2010. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0462423/fullcredits#cast.

18. In one of the forums, Park writes:

I've been wanting to post more of my artwork here for awhile but most of my work I've been doing for the past 2 years is held up in NDAs [non-disclosure agreements]. I've been busy working on the upcoming PS3 game, God of War III. I can't show any of that stuff yet but here's a bunch of images I can show as a follow up to my initial posting of God of War II stuff.

Note further that one of the works of concept art depicts a Kratos-themed "Sackboy", the customizable character of *LittleBigPlanet.* Sony eventually released this version of Sackboy as commercial downloadable content for *LittleBigPlanet* fans: ConceptArt.org. Accessed December 2, 2010. http://www.conceptart.org/forums/showthread.php?t=93220.

19. "Now as before, human beings, individual subjects, stand under a bane. It is the subjective form of the world-spirit, whose primacy over the externalized life-process is reinforced internally. What they can do nothing about, and which negates them, is what they themselves become. They no longer need to acquire a taste for it as what is higher, which it in fact is in contrast to them, in the hierarchy of degrees of universality. On their own, a priori, as it were, they behave in accordance with what is inescapable...
    While the nominalistic principle simulates individualization to them, they act collectively. In human experience, the bane is the equivalent of the fetish-character of the commodity. What is self-made becomes the In-itself, out of which the self can no longer escape; in the dominating faith in facts as such, in their positive acceptance, the subject worships its mirror-image. The reified consciousness has become total as the bane. That it is a false one, holds the promise of the possibility of its sublation: that it would not remain such, that false consciousness would inescapably move beyond itself, that it

could not have the last word. The more the society is steered by the totality, which reproduces itself in the bane of subjects, the deeper too its tendency towards dissociation. This latter threatens the life of the species, as much as it denies the bane of the whole, the false identity of subject and object." Theodor Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973 (337-340). Translated by Dennis Redmond. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf.

20. The specific mechanisms of this spree varied, to be sure. In the industrializing world, neoliberal oligarchs stole the natural resources, state property, and tourist revenues of the postcolonial nations of Eurasia, Latin America, Africa and Asia. In the industrialized world, neoliberal elites used their monopoly on privately-created money, a.k.a. credit from official banks and from the shadow banking system, to embark on vast financial speculations, while squeezing the middle class. No less an authority than Simon Johnson, former chief economist of the IMF, and financial analyst James Kwak concluded that these speculations were overwhelmingly exercises in criminal fraud and waste. See: Simon Johnson and James Kwak. *13 Bankers: The Wall Street Takeover and the Next Financial Crisis.* New York: Pantheon, 2010.

21. One might well ask why this looting spree was allowed to go on for thirty years. One of the major reasons was that the bane of neoliberalism was not just cultural and symbolic in nature, but also took the form of a powerful economic agency. This agency was, just like the bane itself, both completely fictitious and yet completely real. This agency was nothing less than neoliberalism's thirty-year credit bubble. The S & L bubble of the 1980s, the dotcom bubble of the 1990s, and the securitization bubble of the 2000s created the illusion that anyone could become the next billionaire. At the same time, a vast increase in mortgage, consumer and student debt temporarily compensated for the loss of demand caused by the plutocrats getting richer, and everyone else getting poorer – until the whole house of cards collapsed in 2008.

22. David McNally. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and the Global Market*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.

23. "The thorough-going critique of identity gropes for the preponderance [Praeponderanz] of the object. Identity-thinking is, even where it claims otherwise, subjectivistic. To revise this, to account for identity as untruth, establishes no equilibrium between subject and object, no hegemony of the functional concept in the cognition: even where it is only infringed upon, the subject is already disempowered. It knows why it feels absolutely threatened by the slightest surplus of the non-identical, according to the measure of its own absoluteness. Even as something minimal it violates the whole, because the whole is its pretension. Subjectivity changes its quality in a context, which it is not capable of developing out of itself. By means of the inequality in the concept of mediation, the subject falls to the object totally differently than the latter to the former. The object can only be thought through the subject, but always preserves itself in contrast to this as an other; the subject is, however, according to its own constitution, already an object in advance. The object is not to be thought out of existence from the subject, even as an idea; but the subject, from the object." Theodor Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973 (184). Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf.

24. Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Translated By Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1990 (163-165).

25. This expansion of the audience is probably the single most important transformation affecting videogame culture today. Contemporary videogames must appeal to the tastes and sensibilities of the 2 billion individuals who have internet access on our planet, half of whom live in the industrializing

nations – nations which have their own digital media industries and thriving digital commons. Indeed, it was the gravitational pressure of this audience which slowly pushed the center of the videogame industry away from the closed console monopolies of the 1980s and early 1990s (most famously, Nintendo's NES), and towards the partly closed console oligopolies of the 2000s (e.g. Sony's Playstation 2 and Microsoft's Xbox). Currently, this audience is pushing videogame culture towards the partly-open platforms of the 2010s, everywhere from the spread of mobile gaming on Android and iOS devices, to all-digital distribution services such as Valve's Steam and CD Projekt's gog.com. The success of these latter platforms are especially significant, due to the fact that they have been commercially successful while almost completely avoiding Hollywood-style digital rights management schemes or copyright policing.

26. "It is not entirely improbable that the bane is thereby tearing itself apart. What would like to provisionally gloss over the total structure of society under the name of pluralism, receives its truth from such self-announcing disintegration; simultaneously from horror and from a reality, in which the bane explodes. Freud's Civilization and its Discontents has a content, which was scarcely available to him; it is not solely in the psyche of the socialized that the aggressive drives accumulate to the point of openly destructive pressure, but the total socialization objectively breeds its counter-force [Widerspiel], without to this day being able to say, whether it is the catastrophe or the emancipation." Theodor Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973 (339-340). Accessed January 2, 2013. http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf.

27. It should be emphasized that Sony was careful to respect the rights of fans to control their fan labor. SCEA's end-user license explicitly disavows any ownership claim over fan-created levels, which means fans may revise or erase their creations whenever they wish. The only restriction is that fans may not forbid other fans from copying or disseminating anything they have uploaded. In essence, Sony adopted its own version of the Creative Commons strategy of finding constructive ways for individual media creators and the fan community at large to coexist. For further information on Creative Commons, see: Creative Commons. Accessed February 20, 2013. http://creativecommons.org.

28. This sales data was collated by independent fansite VGChartz and based on official Sony press releases: VGChartz.com. Accessed January 2, 2013. http://www.vgchartz.com/gamedb/?name=LittleBigPlanet&publisher=&platform=&genre=&minSales=0&results=200.

29. Minecraft.net. Accessed January 5, 2013. http://minecraft.net/stats.