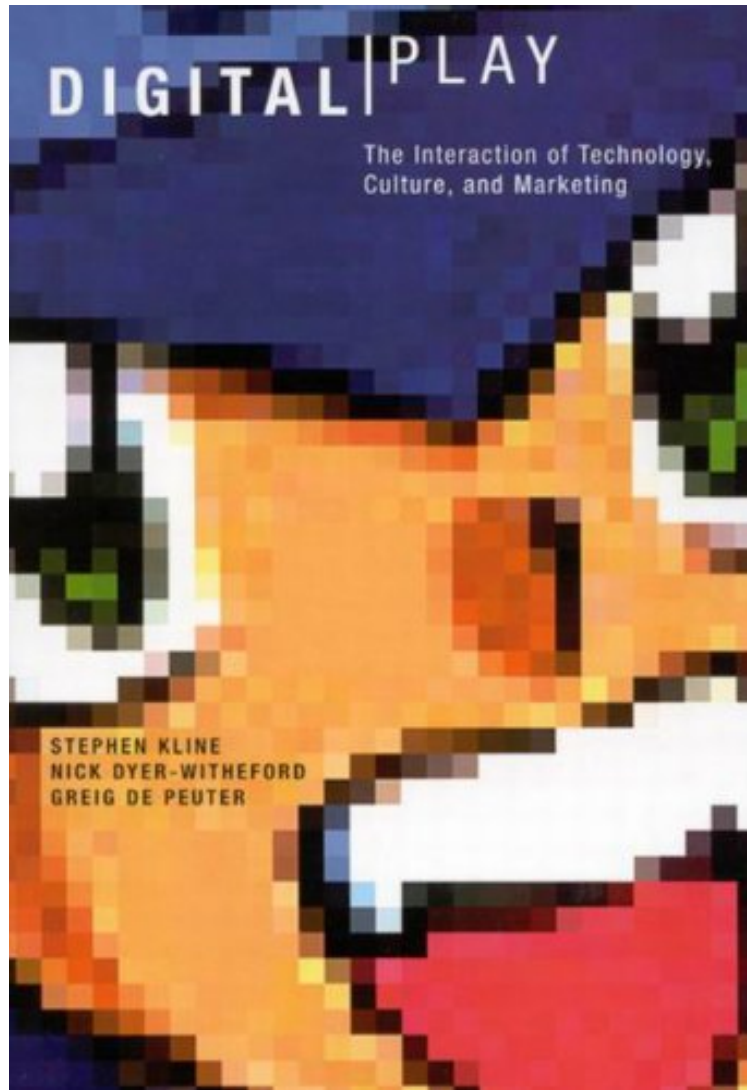


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## Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing

*Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greig de Peuter*

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**Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greig de Peuter : Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Critical postmodern analysis By Malvin "Digital Play" critically analyzes the video and computer game industry and theorizes about its significance in contemporary society. The book is somewhat unusual in that it is the collaborative product of three authors, but the writing seems to blend perfectly

and makes for a consistent and high-quality read. The end product is an accessible and entertaining book that could serve to introduce a wide audience to critical postmodern analysis. Nick Dyer-Witheford of "Cyber-Marx" fame is one of the authors. Mr. Dyer-Witheford's influence is discernable in at least several sections where the post-Marxist themes of corporate control versus freedom that are evident in "Cyber-Marx" are used to very good effect. First, he deflates the wildly optimistic claims of techno-utopians such as Alvin Toffler, reminding us that technology remains in service to corporate profits and therefore narrows and limits the possibility of "choice, interactivity and empowerment" that digital games purportedly offer. Second, Mr. Dyer-Witheford points to piracy and hacking as evidence that freedom from corporate control and a return to "play" in its purest sense may yet remain possible. The authors contend that video games are worthy of serious study because they represent the "ideal-type" postmodern commodity. So whereas the automobile is closely associated with the "industrial capitalism" of the Fordist era, the video game embodies the "information capitalism" of today's "perpetual innovation" society. The ideal-type commodity does not mean that it avoids crisis, however. The authors posit that the accelerating "circuits" of technology, culture and marketing that drive postmodern society in general and the video game business in particular "can be broken or come into contradiction" in numerous ways. The authors go on to critique each of these three circuits and produce many pages of very thoughtful analysis. For example, an interesting aspect of the industry that is often overlooked is manufacturing and the international division of labor. Electronic game equipment is often produced by proletariat labor in the poor countries of the South for the benefit of relatively wealthy consumers in the North. The authors point out that the game industry, like most capitalist enterprises that exploit the so-called free trade system in search of higher profits, will find it difficult to develop new markets for its products until it is willing to pay its third-world factory workers enough money to stimulate demand. In fact, the authors state that corporate managers should not be too surprised when intellectual property gets pirated by people who feel that they have been cheated by the economic system. But probably the most stinging criticism concerns the close connection of games with Cold War research and development. The "militarized masculinity" that characterizes so many games originated here and has been perpetuated by corporate marketing in pursuit of profits. But the authors point out that if the industry fails to find successful alternative game genres and graphic violence continues to escalate, future interest in gaming may be jeopardized even as the potential damage to children exposed to such psychic intensity remains unknown. In short, "Digital Play" is highly recommended to everyone interested in deconstructing the multi-faceted and increasingly fantastical world that has been brought to us by the "military and entertainment" complex.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A clever look at the global industry of interactive gaming. By A Customer. Books on electronic gaming and video game culture predominantly concentrate on the history of the industry or on nostalgic returns to retro gaming, often punctuated with coloured photos and screenshots. Digital Play is one of the few books currently available that provides an insightful look into the social, cultural, and economic relationships between game players, and the engaging game texts, technologies, and market forces of the information age. As interactive gaming continues to establish itself as a major global media business, it becomes increasingly important for us to employ a critical perspective of the blossoming industry. Kline, Witheford, and Peuter's Digital Play couldn't have arrived at a better time. Digital Play is cleverly divided into three segments, each focusing on different bearings of interactive gaming but effectively converging into a single conclusive "coda." Discussion begins with a theoretical approach to analyzing gaming and its industry as it relates to circuits of interactivity including culture, technology, and marketing. Theoretical concepts collected from media theorists Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams, are successfully transferred to the medium of the videogame. What follows is a look at the existence of interactive gaming in a post-Fordist, and postmodern society of information technology and hyper-reality. This facilitates the understanding of historical circumstances of developing circuits of interactivity outlined in earlier chapters. While the first segment may seem theoretically and linguistically intense, it remains deeply involving and is ever mindful of the topic at hand: video games. The second segment of Digital Play covers the historical background of games from their early beginnings in the military-industrial complex to the relentless corporate firefight known to many as the "console wars." However, unlike previous electronic gaming texts, the historical accounts are retold stressing the importance of technology, culture, and marketing. Digital Play thus provides a fresh and extremely entertaining parade through electronic gaming's past. What readers may find most absorbing in this stretch are the political-economic struggles endured by the gaming companies (Atari for example) who pioneered the industry only to meet with fierce competition and an unstable market for interactive entertainment. The initial chapters of Digital Play concentrated on technology and communication studies, and the following chapters zeroed-in on history and marketing practices. However, this theoretical triad could not be complete without the presence of one more area of study: game culture as an industry and practice. In a chapter entitled "Workers and Warez" the authors examine gaming technologies on global levels of production and consumption, such as the exploitation of off-shore labourers and increasing levels of hacking, console "modding", and software piracy. Subsequent chapters provide studies in branding and licensing, violence and gender, and my personal favourite...political economy. Chapter 12 assembles the major themes of Digital Play, suggesting that Electronic Arts' best-selling game "The Sims" can be viewed as a microcosm of our own capitalist society, wrought with consumerist ideology. While we manipulate the digital Barbie dolls of our virtual technology, so too does a

system of communication technologies, global enterprise, and postmodern digital culture manipulate our symbolic relationship with the logic of a capitalist system. I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Digital Play* and wouldn't hesitate to purchase any game-related books that any of the authors might publish in the future. *Digital Play* offers an engaging critical look at the gaming world's industry, technology, and culture, and should not be ignored by those looking to study interactive games from an academic viewpoint or by those simply looking for enjoyable reading.

*Digital Play* offers a critical analysis of interactive media. Inspired by the work of Raymond Williams, the book traces the development of video gaming from its humble origins in hacker circles to its current status as a \$20 billion global cultural industry. Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter systematically debunk cyber-guru optimism about globally networked digital communications by analysing the management practices of the corporations that designed and marketed video games to youthful audiences. They reveal that the ascent of this new communications industry has been anything but smooth and inevitable. From Atari to Microsoft, *Space Invaders* to *The Sims*, the authors uncover the successive crises that forced game makers, faced with constant instabilities in the global entertainment sector, to become increasingly innovative.

"The authors are to be commended for undertaking this major history of the video game in our contemporary global economy. I am impressed with their research, and the arguments are convincingly developed using careful textual analysis and powerful graphic illustrations."