

gameZ & ruleZ. The Mechanics of Play in Arts and Culture **20. & 21. Oktober 2022**

Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, Toni-Areal, 5.K12 (Kunstraum)

Matteo Bittanti. The Politics of Play / Playful Politics

Abstract

Walter Benjamin concluded his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935-1936) with the diagnosis that society stood at a crossroad: art could become political and/or politics could become aestheticized. The latter option would inevitably lead to friction, violence, and destruction. History tells us that his warning turned out to be prophetic. Keeping in mind that Benjamin used the term “art” as a synonym of what we would call popular culture – first and foremost, cinema –, in this talk I will argue that today we stand at another crossroad. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of contemporary popular culture, video games, are becoming increasingly politicized. At the same time, politics are becoming “gamified”. What are the stakes? What kinds of scenarios might these tendencies lead to? This talk provides an overview of the video games-politics nexus, exploring such topics as the politics of video games, the relationship between political propaganda and gaming, the increasing politicization of gamer culture, and more. Plenty of examples and case studies will be provided that hopefully will lead to a fruitful conversation.

Bio

Matteo Bittanti’s academic research focuses on the cultural, social, and theoretical aspects of emerging technologies, with an emphasis on their effects on communication, visual culture, and the arts. His approach is interdisciplinary, connecting media studies, game studies, visual studies, and art history. He is an Associate Professor at IULM University where he teaches courses on media studies and game studies. Since 2019, He has been on the Board of the Doctorate program in Visual & Media Studies at IULM University, Milan. He lives in San Francisco and Milan.

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