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Hyperreal Governance? Baudrillard’s Media Theory and Computer Games as Institutions of Political Socialization

Abstract:

Video games are a form of political reality in their own right, and playing them is a political activity. In this paper, I apply Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrum and simulation to virtual realities, specifically to video games. I argue that new (entertainment) technologies change the nature of political processes, their complexity, and, most of all, their proximity to citizens’ everyday lives. They do so because they are simulacra of the political world: There are parallels between playing a game and governance; games address political issues and values; and they strongly reference political, economic, and social power structures. I propose to understand engagement with video games as engagement in “hyperreal politics,” or, using Baudrillard’s terms, “politics in vitro.”