

DOMINANCE AND SECURITY IN THE POWER DISCOURSES: SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION AS AN EXAMPLE OF DISCOURSES IN POWER-GAMES

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Abstract

This paper brings upon securitization studies, views to domination and discursive practices in theoretical framework and links them into the legendary computer game to show how the concept of the world in the game follows the theories and understanding of the world in social sciences. The claim is that the player playing the civilization will get used to concepts of different theoretical tools and ask questions about computer games and their influence to social practices and learning processes in modern societies.

1. Introduction

No one questions the influence of the mass media on the people and their perception of the world. Media is not just entertaining or informing audiences - it is normalizing people into the

society. We can say that a lot of scholars in contemporary media, cultural, and anthropological studies already consider so called new media the most important influential factor that transforms societies and leads the socialization process in developed countries, western democracies.

cultural, social and economical capital – and the power and rush for hegemony.

The ultimate answer of how to win the “long run” is to spread your cultural, national and military influence all over the world and this is the insurance-security that the player creates a civilization that will stand the test of time. The following work tries to offer approach to analyze social processes with

If we use here the term of Althusser¹, we can call computers and computer games part of the ideological state apparatuses. As these “things” take part in the socialization process, they reproduce the way of thinking and understanding of the word. Even more, some computer enthusiasts – cybertarians already define PC as the essential part of the person. As stated in the Estonian leading computer magazine:

¹ Louis Althusser. [1970] 1993. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation). Essays on Ideology. London: Verso, 1-60.

That's why we can without overstating name the computer as the mirror of the person's soul. (...) It is natural that youngsters interested in cars prefer to play the Need for Speed and gentleman interested in politics spend hours in the Civilization World.²

Computer games are no longer a new phenomenon in society, the generation under 30 has been greatly influenced by computers and computer games, because they have grown up in the environment of information technology and the era of development of computers and games. If we look at the generation between 15-20 years the main media used is computer oriented and consists of all features related to information technology.

Here is the answer as to why we should pay attention to the computer games and discourses created and mediated by the games. If people spend more time in gaming than watching TV or other forms of entertainment then this new media has more influence on them than traditional media that has been researched. If we take a certain game and find discourses in that, we can ask questions whether these discourses are really there in the society and if they are reflecting reality and power relations in the game or is the game creating new discourses that can be brought into the

“real” world to use this medium as a tool of spreading ideology.

The question of this paper is not connected to the question whether people are influenced by computer games or not. It is rather interested in the question how the game looks like and how it fits into the real life. As Miller (2006, 8) stated, when one researches computer games he or she could ask several different questions: who makes the games, who profits from them, how they target audience, what games look like, what they are like to play, and how they fit in with social life.

This paper searches for the answer as to how one of the world's most legendary simulation and strategy computer games – Sid Meier's Civilization - creates the perception of the world and state security through discourses in the game. The research is more interested in discursive practice and also in social practice that emerges in the game not in the textual construction in the micro level. We could ask how the game looks like, how it fits into the “real world” and how it maybe reproduces society and understanding about the world processes.

In order to reach previously mentioned goal the paper opens different approaches to the social systems and concepts of domination and power struggles. In the second part different thoughts about security are introduced. Into this somehow triangulated framework (social theory and security issues combined), the case study is

² Laur, Valdek 2005. Hingede Peeglid (Mirrors of the Souls) *Arvutimaailm (The World of Computers)* 10/05. 51

fitted. The goal is to analyze the game concept, the power of “world creation” and development of the game concept from 1991 to 2005. Sources are game manuals, computer magazines and forums on the Internet and the case study is based greatly on the paper that has been written for the Discourse Analysis class in Central European University in the fall semester 2005/2006. This analysis brings together discourses over power and power relations and elaborates it into the security sphere. Power means hegemony, and a struggle is about changing power relations and securing your own nation. We look at the game as a social construction, which has a close relation to the “real” living world.

Also, the paper addresses to the question of how the game is used in education. We try to show that this computer game has close connections to world history and it is a tool for learning and creating a certain ideology programmed into the game and that is why this game should be researched in order to identify the discursive practices emerging from the game.

2. Theoretical approaches that bring all together

Questions of dominance and ruling the nation or the whole world have been points of interest for many scholars in almost every field of social and humanitarian science. In the field of communication, the concept of dominance is introduced with the help of framing and “master frames” that

create dominant discourses and through it new social practices. In the next few paragraphs we discuss the process how media becomes a helpful tool for creating dominance and repetitive power relations.

The media could be seen in many ways; in this research we take two perceptions of mediation given by McQuail (1994, 65-66): (i) filter or gatekeeper, acting to select parts of experience for special attention and closing other views and voices, whether deliberately or not; (ii) a screen or barrier, indicating the possibility that the media might cut us off from reality, by providing a false view of the world, through either escapist fantasy or propaganda. One could ask why we do not consider media as a place of discussion or “fourth” power-“watchdog”. In this context computer games carry already undisputable discourses and practices, which are already written by producers and there is no place for discussion and questions. This narrowing of the concept clarifies the role of games as media.

We can now move further to the next important concept which is framing. It is a dynamic process by which producers and receivers of messages transform information into a meaningful whole by interpreting them through other available social, psychological, and cultural concepts, axioms and principles (Fischer 2003). Frames are tools to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. Speaking about

frames we must remember that frames highlight some bits of information in order to elevate them in salience. An increase of salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory.³ Now we can see that in the media, such as computer games are, the power of framing is even more crystallized than in other media branches, because players are acting in the frames they have already accepted and their social practices in the game are already determined by the “master frame”, the game concept. It will be explained in the next paragraph why this is a very important point in the argumentation.

We can claim that Norman Fairclough’s theory of social practices as discourses⁴ is applicable to the game concepts that can be viewed as texts in the broader sense and these texts are the sources of creating discourses and practices. If it is so, the dominant frame with the dominant discourse reproduces the same power relations and social order. It means, if we study the world of the game we could see how it constructs and reconstructs the “real” world and how the “real” is framed in the simulated environment. Here lays the theoretical argumentation to justifying

the research of discourses and social practices in the game.

In the next chapter we look at the security issue as an indicator to illuminate the game’s role in creating discourses and understanding about domination through the broad concept of security.

3. “New security” and securitization as a social change

After the ending of the Cold War the main and the central problem of security studies has been the inability to agree what is *security*. In his book Buzan brings out twelve different definitions of states’ security (1991, 16) that has been used by different scholars and shows that *security* is a very ambiguous term and there is even no opportunity to agree upon the definition. Buzan⁵ claims that the most important is not the definition itself, but the process where actors try to get rid of threats. For policy making the most important factor is the understanding that security is usually connected and interlocked with the survival of the people, state or organization and this gives the way and legality to the

³ Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor. *Social Cognition*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991).

⁴ Norman Fairclough. *Discourse and Social Change*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)

⁵ Barry Buzan. *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the post-Cold War Era*. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 18..

extraordinary measures to deal with the certain threat.⁶

The previously-named approach is based on the two concepts: (i) *securitization* and (ii) *speech act*. (i) *Securitization* is, according to Buzan, the extreme version of the politicization. In theory every public question or public issue can be on the spectrum ranging from non-politicized (state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision), through politicized (the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocation, or more rarely, some other communal governance) to securitized (the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure).⁷ In theory, any question could be on any level on this spectrum depending on environment and timeframe.

This question could be answered and clarified by the concept of (ii) *speech act*. In this framework questions become the security issues through the speech act. In matters that concern state security, the speaker is usually the government or political leaders. State securitizes certain issues and gives to the state's institutions the legitimate use

of extraordinary measures to deal with the threat. In the game, the speaker is the gamer who can make some issue in the game (strategic natural resource, geographic location, neighbor, technology, diplomatic agreement etc.) an issue of security and start war or some other "abnormal" forceful actions. As we can think further, how certain issues or threats become a matter of national security. It is not only the question of the type of the threat but also the question how state, people or even mass media perceives the threat and also how it is framed and brought into the agenda. Taking to account the previous two paragraphs we move closer to the securitization studies. Framework of securitization allows us to move beyond the state and military power that is very important in contemporary security studies. Buzan describes five security sectors where threats influence human collectivities: military, political, environmental, societal and economic.⁸

In this point I would like to refer to Fairclough who states that discourse is a practice, not only the reflection of social practice and representing the world but signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning. For this analysis it means that we do not search for the "real" threats, as understood in traditional security studies. Our aim is to bring

⁶ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (London: Boulder, 1998), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸ Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the post-Cold War Era*. 1991.

together more constructivist and critical security thinking combined with textual analysis that is used in media studies and political science. As described before one can look to the securitization process as a social change where one issue is moved from publicly debated questions to the field of security and recognized as a threat to the actor.⁹ It means that state or other actors can use methods that are not usually “normal”. If we treat the securitization process as a social change – the change of the meaning of the security through the change of the security discourse in the key texts, then we can use methodology used by Fairclough.

One could ask how it relates to the media and especially to the computer game discussed earlier. In the next paragraphs we give the possible way to link security, securitization to the concept of domination through symbolic power.

Bourdieu’s theory about three capitals and everlasting struggle over symbolic power is the connecting bridge in this discussion. He distinguishes three capitals that are possible ways to getting symbolic power – the world constituting power. These capitals are economic, social and cultural.¹⁰

Through the accumulation of these capitals one reaches to the level where it has the symbolic power to create social order.

In the broad security framework and dynamic approach of securitization we can see the pattern to securitize issues that influence (usually decrease) the amount of certain capitals. It means that the security struggle is actually about the capital to convert to symbolic power. It leads to the domination, because who controls symbolic power has capability to produce “master frames” with discourses that will reproduce power relations needed for the domination. We can add here one remark from Niklas Luhmann’s theory about self reproducing social systems and we have conceptualized the idea for “broad security”. It is about system reproduction, in other word about securitizing factors that are needed for accumulating resources (either economical or cultural or social) for keeping system capable of self reproduction (gaining symbolic power and constituting social practices).

Now we have presented theoretical “tools” and connections between media system performance, games, securitization and domination. At this point the paper will continue with the analysis of the game concept and its usage in the educational system.

⁹ Fairclough. *Discourse and Social Change*. 1992.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. “The Forms of Capital”. in John Richardson, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of*
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Education. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

*4. Sid Meier's Civilization – "the game that stands the test of time"*¹¹

The first release of the civilization was in the U.S. in 1991 by MicroProse Software and the main designer of the game was Sid Meier whose name is now a trademark of so called "reality" strategy games. The inspiration of the game was board games and this was one huge step in developing games on computer that converted simulation of the world and mixed board game features. Sequel of the game, Sid Meier's Civilization II was released in 1996. III part and IV part were released by Firaxis Games respectively in 2001 and in 2005. All games have got superb ratings almost in every computer game magazine and the last version, part IV released in October 2005, took almost all the awards.¹² According to the figures provided by 2Kgames, the number of copies sold before releasing the IV part was over 6 million.¹³ If we take into account the high rate of illegal software and the download of illegal copies

of computer games we can assume that the number of actual players is much higher.

5. The build-up of the "reality" in the Sid Meier's Civilization

We start looking into the game from the very first idea of the civilization and move through the time to the year 2006 where the Firaxis game Civilization is III is used as a "stealth" education material and discussed at educational conferences.¹⁴

The first passage manual of the Civilization I tells us that:

Civilization casts you as the ruler of an entire civilization through many generations, from the founding of the first cities 6,000 years ago to the imminent colonization of space. It combines the forces that shaped history and the evolution of technology in a competitive environment. You have great flexibility in your plans and strategies, but to survive, you must successfully respond to the forces that historically shaped the past.¹⁵

As we see, the gamer is put into the place of the ruler and his or her mission is to lead their own civilization/nation to the victory using different "tools" as military, science, luxuries, diplomacy

¹¹ Firaxis Games, the company that released last part of the Civilization, fourth one, uses slogan "Games that stand the test of time". Lots of users on the web have used different variations of this slogan to describe the Civilization game concept.

¹² Firaxis Official web page. Game reviews: www.firaxis.com/games/awards.php?id=GAMCIVIV (5. January 2006)

¹³ 2Kgames Official web site 2005. www.2kgames.com/civ4/home.htm (4 January 2006)

¹⁴ Firaxis Official Webpage, Teacher Features www.firaxis.com/community/teacher.php (5. January 2006).

¹⁵ Civilization I manual 1999: www.civfanatics.com/civ1/txt/civ1_man.txt (5. January 2006)

and economy etc. And what is important for discourse is that the game refers directly to history and historical forces that shaped the past. The game's reality is created with the connection to the past (World history) and we can not separate this game from the so-called "reality". If we continue reading the manual, it can be called the "Holy book" of the "religion" of civilization we find suggestions as:

Successful wars can be very useful. Capturing cities is much easier than building them up from nothing, and may provide loot in stolen technology and cash. Weakening rivals reduces the threat they pose (...) The fundamental concepts for a successful civilization are the expansion and growth of your cities, and acquiring new technology. In a word, you must grow (...) You must press forward on all three fronts: spread your cities out to claim a significant share of the world, increase the size and production of each city, and strive to acquire the latest technology".¹⁶

After reading these paragraphs we could find similarities to a Marxist thinking about the world order consisting capital (resources in the world), knowledge (latest technology) and struggle to convert it into the power with the goal to have hegemony in the world and securing your own nation. It is also important to look at the words threat, growth, dynamic etc. these words are linkage to the theoretical

framework discussed about dynamic securitization processes.

First release of the Civilization I offered quite simple view to the world and player could win the game by crushing all the enemies or launching the space ship first, which means figuratively technological and industrious superiority. But the question remains of how to rule the empire? The player could choose a different government to rule the state and every type had different traits and influence on economy, military and corruption. Civilization I offered six government types: Despotism, Anarchy, Monarchy, Communism, The Republic, and Democracy

As shown, we can use the manual as superficial encyclopedia which is rating different types of governments from most undeveloped and not "for people" to the best (more democratic and developed) and most beneficial (in economic sense). And these governments show the "negative correlation" between the government type and eagerness to wage war because of "people's decisions". But if we look for players' comments on different governments we can find out that small wars could be waged if players have a huge state. It is possible because "game's reality" calculates unhappy citizens per city and in the case of huge empire certain amount of military could be sent out from homeland to fight the "defensive wars".

¹⁶ *Civilization Manual*

All these governments could be chosen as “game reality” developed and the player could make decisions inside the government frame about tax rates, amounts of money he spends to luxuries (to keep people happy) or invest to science. In some sense these government types are just frames in which player can use state ideological and repressive apparatuses. It sounds like perfect world where only question is how to divide revenue from labor and reproduce knowledge and labor force.

Now we have described the basics of Civilization that have been there in the game for almost 15 years. Next Civilizations added more features to the "world" in order to make this game more "real" than ever.

6. Culture, nationality and religion in the Sid Meier's Civilization

As social scientists moved from pure Marxist theory - "economic capital equals power" to more broader concepts of power, also Civilization moved a huge step forward when Firaxis released the Civilization III and introduced lot of new features allowing player to feel more real when deciding over the fate of his or her empire.

As we are interested in the practices concerning discursive and social practices in the game we have to search for the indicators that reflect the understanding about the world and power. One of the most important new features that are relevant to our topic is

culture and the second that closely relates to a culture is a nationality.

Culture is a very important component of Civ III. It is the general social cohesion of your civ, as well as the impact of your nation's philosophy and arts on the world”

Culture's effects are most visible in the expansion of borders, but it also affects how other civs interact with you in diplomatic sessions (...) One of our goals in developing the culture system was to provide a powerful alternative to war and conquest.

As borders expand around your cities, they can eventually join to create a unified national border. Culture also helps decide border disputes.

Finally, a smaller city bordering a larger city with a substantial culture will sometimes be assimilated into the Civilization with the more dominant culture.

In Civilization III, each citizen in a city has nationality (...) the citizens in the conquered city will retain their nationality, even as new citizens are born with the nationality of the conquering civ.

These "foreign nationals" may "resist" for many game turns, depending on the cultures of the conquering civ and the conquered civ.

In extreme cases, a city with substantial culture can actually fight off its conquerors and return to its original nationality, but in most cases, resisters will eventually rejoin the rest of the population.

Finally, over time, foreign nationals can assimilate into the culture of the city in which they live.¹⁷

This introduction of culture and nationality brings to the Civilization a new dimension and understanding about world order. It is not only economic resources and military that are needed for domination and ruling the world, culture as a thing itself in the game is one very important factor to focus on. Cultural hegemony is a victory condition in the game and we can draw parallels to Bourdieu's three capitals (1986, 1994) mentioned before. In the game his theoretical thoughts about the social system is brought to reality - social, economic and cultural capital should be converted into (symbolic) power to achieve victory - dominance in the world. One could ask how social capital is represented in the game. Social capital is the diplomacy concept in the game. If you have network of civilizations that support your initiatives you could achieve a victory just through networks:

The diplomatic victory condition is enabled after the United Nations wonder has been built. Once built, the UN will meet periodically to vote on a leader. Any *civ* that receives a majority of votes from the U.N. council wins the game.¹⁸

But the development of the Civilization has not been stopped. Firaxis released new version of the Civilization and the most crucial add-on was bringing the religion concept to the game. As Barry Caudill, Civilization IV Senior Producer on Religion stated:

Religion has always played a critical part in human history. Through religion, man has sought to make sense of the universe around him.¹⁹

One interesting thing is that religions are important game features to make alliances and peace. Civilizations in the same religion are more likely to cooperate. But no differences are made between religions. We can ask why these seven religions have been chosen. Why not some ancient tribal religion to be added to the game? Interesting explanation to the problem is answered in the Civilization game manual.

We know that people have extremely strong opinions about religions – in fact, many a war has arisen when these beliefs collide. We at Firaxis have no desire to offend anyone (All religions in the game have the same effects, the only difference being their technological requirements). When determining which seven to include, we picked those religions that we thought would be most familiar to our audience. We do not mean to imply that these religions are more important, better or worse than any other religions. We offer no value judgments on religion; we mean no disrespect to

¹⁷ The official Civilization III web site: 2002.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Apolyton Civilization Site 2005. Civ 4.

anyone's beliefs. We're game designers, not theologians.²⁰

Lots of reviews have mentioned also this "problem" with the religion in the game, which tries to reflect the reality and be the most real strategy game in the world. Many comments are derived from the assumptions that religion is a touchy subject. This disclaimer shows again that this game is dependent on the real world and on our perception of the world. Notions as "most familiar", "better or worse than any other religion", "no value judgments on religion" show that in order to be selling the game all over the world issues of religion can not be raised, even if it is "just" a game.

We can say that in Civilization IV the game concept has reached the level where we can analyze the game as social systems with economy, culture, social/diplomatic relations and religion. But still the question could be raised is this the reflection of the reality or is this game is creating new perception of the world among the players and not society around us teaches about the social interaction but the game creates behavior to be transferred into the real world. From here we reach to the question to be raised, of how this game could be used in educational work in the learning process. As we saw the game is not reflecting the history as a continuum, it creates new

understanding by taking pieces of different concepts and mixes all this together in the so called "real" but simulated world.

7. Sid Meier's Civilization as a tool for education

"You have to balance war and diplomacy, and resources," says Kimberly Weir, an assistant professor of political science at Northern Kentucky University who had several students keep logs — including the one quoted above — while playing Civ3".

"Students felt they better understood what it takes to balance a country," Weir adds"

"Squire has studied middle school kids who played Civ3. He found that some students who were able to spend the hours needed to learn the game began to identify "rules" by which history progressed; rules that apply to such issues as resource allocation, the tradeoff between aggressive military expansion and diplomacy, and technological exchange among societies"

"Several professors said that Civilization I and II were too warfare-oriented to be useful in class, but that the diplomacy options have been ramped up in the third edition".²¹

These samples are just some pieces of information from the Internet to show that in the U.S. the practice in the higher education enterprises is to use

²⁰ Civilization IV game manual; Republic of T. 2005

²¹ David Epstein, "Not Just Child's Play", *Inside Higher Ed.* 28.11.2005 www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/11/28/civ (6. January 2006)

simulation computer games to explain the history, geography or other phenomena. Games are treated as schoolbooks that contain information that is needed to deliver to students. Firaxis has even created a special section "Teacher features" on their web page.

Teachers have found that some games in particular have a remarkable ability to keep students engaged and teach them at the same time. The basic requirements for a "stealth" teaching game is that it be fun, that in order to succeed in the game the student needs to learn about "real world" topics, . . . Much to our surprise, teachers around the world have been using Firaxis games for these purposes. Sid Meier's Civilization III, in particular, is now widely being used to teach students about history, geography, politics, and the like — though we in no way intentionally designed it to be used as such.²²

As we see from their page Firaxis Games has understood the huge market for these games in recognizing that these games have influence over the students. If we remember the concept of ideological state apparatuses, computer games get more and more role in the learning process and through those carriers of ideology. And we saw that these "real" worlds are following the logic of theories of social sciences and try to simulate worlds. But questions

could be still raised who controls the resources and "Gods" who create these worlds and discourses over world. We can see that these games are not reflections of the reality - these games live their own life and create new knowledge about life. As Firaxis participates actively in the conferences to promote his games it would be necessary to follow the steps and look deeply - into the games that are produced in order to promote "stealth learning". Questions that should be answered are related to the concept of religion thus Civilization IV includes these features and would be interesting to see how this game is taken as a model of the world order.

One conclusion can be made from this chapter. Civilization games have really stood the test of time and they have got even more attention. These games are not only for "freaks" who spend free time playing the "World creation". The more sophisticated and real these games become, more and more they start to influence teaching and studying. This is one certain thing when we look the discourses that are related to the Civilization as a game concept. We can say that we can analyze this game equal to the schoolbooks, because it is used as the true reflection of the world and international relations. And at this point we have shown that this game has the potential to bring to near reality an ideological state apparatus that reproduces certain values and understandings about the social system in the "real world".

²² Firaxis Official Webpage, Teacher Features.

8. Conclusion

This paper brought upon securitization, domination and discursive practices in a theoretical framework and linked them inside the legendary computer game to show how the concept of the world in the game follows the theories and understanding of the world in social sciences. If we look at the game, it has more and more features in the virtual game world and this brings it closer to our “real world”. This is not any more just an oversimplification of the life, this is the environment to simulate lessons in international relations lessons.

One still can ask how these discursive practices influence our social practices in the real world where we have more different variables than influence our life. But some interesting thoughts have risen from this discussion for further analysis. We can say that the player playing the civilization will get used to concepts of cultural, social and economic capital – power and rush for hegemony in all these areas. It is the dominant ideology in this game. The ultimate answer of how to win is to spread your cultural, national and military influence all over the world and this is the insurance-security that the player creates a civilization that will stand the test of time. How this will influence the next generation that will make decisions in the future in the “real world” is not the question here, but in the sociological viewpoint the influence of this game is very interesting. Maybe some signs come out from the game we

do not want to admit, but we want people to believe and take it normal.

Is it really so that under the democracy war is possible to wage if you have enough luxuries to spend to keep people happy? War is sometimes the best way to rapid development? War is the measure to continue diplomatic actions? Spreading your religion and culture turns people to make revolts in their homeland and more eager to join your empire? Economic, social and cultural growth is the measure of the success? People are just resource as any other? Domination is the only solution?

These are just rhetorical questions and lot of questions can not be answered easily. This paper tried to offer different approach to analyze social processes with different theoretical tools and ask questions about computer games and their influence to social practices.

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