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PINK MACHINE PAPERS

Playing With Covers

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- The Dynamics of Video Game Packages

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Introduction

Traditional package research is focused on packaging up to the point-of-sales—environmental characteristics to protect the innards and appealing exterior to maximize positive consumer responses (Underwood, Klein and Burke 2001). This kind of research is based on a static and dichotomous sender-receiver model view of producer-consumer communication—the producer/sender encodes a message that is later decoded by the consumer. While this approach might be fruitful from a retailing or product-marketing point of view, it does not address the broader cultural implications of its consumption. Packages have to capture and visually communicate on a very limited space the essence of an entire product. This paper's analytical framework regards consumption in general and packaging in particular as part of a broader cultural system of visual consumption. Similar approaches are scarce with Frank Cochoy's (2004) work on package design and Jonathan Schroeder's (2002) work on advertising as few exceptions.

This paper explores a particular subset of package consumption in a young and fairly unexplored industry—the video game industry, that has successfully grown from a esoteric garage hobby to a multibillion dollar industry in less than two decades, challenging the movie industry in terms of revenues and eclipsing even the biggest Hollywood openings (Becker 2004). Some consumer research has been done in the field of video and computer games, highlighting aspects such as experiences and enjoyment (Holbrook, *et al.* 1984), technology consumption (Mick and Fournier 1998) and gender (Dobscha 2003). Computer gaming constitutes a new form of consumption due to the intrinsically unique characteristics of the medium. A classic approach to this consumption form, treating it as either product or service doesn't fully reveal the dynamics of video game consumption and its interactive nature.

The intersection of package design, video games and consumption is largely unexplored by previous research. This paper focuses on the notion of *boxart* which in the video game industry refers to the decorations and illustrations found on the covers of game packages (Edge 2002). The study consequently touches upon the interconnection between two interesting fields of consumption: visual consumption (through package design) and video game consumption. By applying two corresponding analytical frameworks, visual analysis and consumer interviews, we attempt to explore how game covers, and in particular sport game covers, allude to broader cultural frameworks in order to communicate gameplay experiences through visual representations. The study focus on sport game covers, revealing three major conceptual themes in package design called 'the hero myth', 'the lens' and 'virtual and real'. These three themes make reference to common notions in visual and video game consumption frameworks. By approaching package design from these two consumption perspectives we aim to elucidate a previously overlooked intersection of new forms of consumption and visual representations.

Contextualizing the game industry

The game industry is a young industry—what is considered to be the first computer game ever (Kent 2001, p. 15) was created in 1962 by a MIT student called Steve Russell. The first commercial computer games were introduced during the 1970's with arcade game hits like *Pong*, *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*. During the 1970's the first computer game devices for the home, so-called game consoles, appeared on the market with the arrival of *Magnavox Odyssey* and *Atari 2600*. Several other game consoles were introduced until the market, and the game industry as a whole, crashed in the beginning of the 1980's due to an oversupply of mediocre games and the introduction of the personal computer. In 1985 the game industry recovered and made its global breakthrough when a Japanese company called Nintendo introduced their game console called Famicom in Japan and NES (Nintendo Entertainment System) in the rest of the world. In a both positive and negative way Nintendo and its first console strongly shaped society's image of the game industry and of electronic games as a mainstream phenomenon. Nintendo was long the undisputed ruler of the game industry, until Sega effectively challenged its position in the beginning of the 1990's. Since then many companies have tried to conquer the temporary market leader. Some (Sega, Sony) have succeeded, while others (Sega, 3DO, Atari, Matsushita, Microsoft) have failed. In the middle of the 1990's computer games stopped being just a niche and became a vital part of the strategy for the electronics industry. Just in 1992, Nintendo earned, on its console business, more than all the major US film studios, and more than Apple, IBM and Microsoft (Scheff 1999, p. 5) Today the industry has a market size of around $20 billion which is expected to reach $30 billion by 2007 (RocSearch 2004).

Sport games

Sport games are the largest game genre in the game industry and account for more than 22% of game sales revenues (Ratliff 2003). Sport games are the most popular game genre in terms of market share in the USA (Brown and Cooper 2002, p. 8-9) and in most other markets. It represents the most lucrative but also one of the most competitive segments of the game market. All major players in the industry depend on sport game hits since these are 'cash cows' with millions of games in sales. Game publishers are investing vast amounts into improving and updating games ahead of each new sport season in order to satisfy the increasing demands on realism of graphics, sounds and animations. *Madden NFL*, one of the most successful sport games of all times, published by Electronic Arts, has an annual development budget of $12 million (Ratliff 2003) which is approximately 3 to 4 times more than an average development budget for a high quality console game. The marketing budget for the same game is $15 million (Ratliff 2003), which is several times larger than marketing budgets for high quality games in other game segments. This clearly shows the importance of the sport game genre for the game publishers and the game industry as a whole.

In the game industry sport games are primarily about one company, Electronic Arts (EA). EA is the world largest game publisher and basically invented and developed the sport game genre into its current state with global high profile franchises. They control 44% of the sport game

market, which is almost 4 times more than the closest competitor Activision (Ratliff 2003). The enormous success of EA is in large part based on their sport division called *EA Sports*, which accounted for almost half of EA's $1.5 billion in annual revenue in 2002. EA Sports is also one of the few successful publisher brands in the game industry. Most other game publishers haven't succeeded in creating recognized brands. In this situation the EA Sports brand is really a unique exception, which again shows the strength and importance of sport games in this industry.

Package Themes

There are studies about consumers reaction to package design up until the point-of-sales, mainly from a perceptual-psychological point of view, with the notion that "the primary role for product packaging at the shelf is to generate consumer attention by breaking through the competitive clutter" (Underwood*, et al.* 2001, p. 403). While physical characteristics (and the ability to stand out on a cluttered shelf) are important, little is known about the actual consumption practices of packages and package design. This is especially true in the field of experience goods, such as movies, CDs, and in our case computer games. What values are imbued into the packaging, before and after the "actual" product is consumed for the first, and the thousand, time? Boxart is not merely a Mars bar wrapper (not to demean those in any way), tossed away directly after the purchase, but rather a companion for much longer, creating an intricate bond with the player. While package design is performing as aesthetic objects, in other words, style and fashion has created a aestethesized consumption that has been called the art-culture system (Lury 1996), they are also part of a system of visual representation that creates meaning within the circuit of culture—beyond the intentions of the package creators, in much the same way as advertising (Schroeder 2002). Boxart is thus not only relating to the game it is portraying, but also to more general culture issues.

Mainstream package design research makes classical assumptions about product utility and its relation to consumption patterns; measuring how effectively this is conveyed by the packaging. This is fundamentally a product-oriented approach, not applicable to new types of consumption like computer games, or almost any kind of consumption in a hyperaffluent society, where visual consumption eclipse more traditional forms of consumption (Schroeder 2002, p. 7). Computer games differentiate themselves even further from seemingly similar goods like television and music, by demanding an active and participative consumption.

As an attempt to bridge the gap between new types of consumption, like computer games, and visual consumption through packaging (Cochoy 2004), this paper presents three discernable general themes elucidated by juxtaposing visual analysis and interviews with gamers.

The Hero Myth

While boxart of sports games play on different societal conventions, or myths, to gain consumers attention, the mythical hero is the most evident. Our society is, according to Barthes (1973), largely built around an expansive network of myths concerning most everyday activi-

ties. These, naturally, affect consumer culture as well, thus gaining the attention of much contemporary research (cf., Holt 2003; Thompson 2004), that taps into the interaction between societal anxieties (in part created by myths) and brands trying to relieve these. As myths are "second-order semiological systems" (Barthes 1973, p. 123) they represent cultural signifiers already loaded with meaning both portraying and reducing these socio-cultural tensions. One of the oldest and most prominent myths in our society is the hero. One could say that the earliest signs of civilization are born alongside the myths of heroes, deeply embedding it into culture (Campbell 1968).

Already in ancient Greece (and in earlier civilizations as well) the hero myth played an important part of society, with Homer's *Odyssey* and the like, but all heroes are true to their time. While the hero has 'always' been there, their role or persona, has changed, "in classical times heroes were god-men; in the Middle Ages they were God's men; in the Renaissance universal men; in the eighteenth century enlightened gentlemen; in the nineteenth century self-made men. In our own time we are seeing the common man become heroic" (Fishwick 1954, p. 4). The common man hero cannot, however, stay common, but rather become "the athlete entertainer, 'focused', bold, stylish but above all glamorous, wealthy, admired and envied, the personification of success in the Age of Materialism, Media Make-Believe and Beautiful People" (Holt and Mangan 1996, p. 5). The creation (and consumption) of sports heroes is a rather new phenomenon, with a long history. The modern sports hero dates back not much earlier than late nineteenth century, with the birth of sports like cricket and soccer. There are of course many reasons why sports have become such a cornerstone in contemporary hero making. It might be that they exist in an "apolitical, amoral, even timeless, placeless quality of the athletic contest itself enabling the heroes of the contests to remain unchanged for decades" (Oriard 1982, p. 126).

While only the modern times has created the sports superstar it is not the first time sports has been cherished, but we have to go back to the Odyssean Greeks to find the same kind of apotheosis of athletic activity and the athlete we have today. The birth of the Olympic games marks the birth of the sportsman, as winners were hailed with the same zest as today's David Beckhams, being able to live of their triumphs for the rest of their lives. But what is really remembered from this epoch, and creating the archetype for the modern view of athletes, are the statues of homage, illustrated in figure 1, immortalizing the athlete in action. The active stance and the sense of flowing motion of the Greek statues has become a de facto standard of portraying modern athletic performance and performers as well.

Figure 1

The Lens

The most central issue, in this paper, is *how* the image of sports is perceived and viewed. Through the lens of a camera, we think, is the obvious answer. Or more precisely, through the lens of a TV camera—a sport broadcast. Lenses are nothing you see, but see through, and its development was largely influenced by the assumption that everything can be made visible—with the right lens (Schroeder 2004). This has been inherited by cameras and photography, with the consequently truth telling picture. Lenses, or pictures created by a camera, do not, however, show an unbiased and transparent truth, instead "*what a photograph shows us is how a particular thing could be seen, or could be made to look*—at a specific moment, in a specific context, by a specific photographer employing specific tools" (Coleman 1998, p. 58, emphasis in original). The invisibility of the lens makes us often forget the framing function of it, and even more its distancing features. While this is true for photographers, always distancing themselves from the real action by way of the camera, it is even more so for the [passive] observer of the ready-made photograph, or as Schroeder (2002) points out, that we "live by the lenses of technology – cameras, video equipment, computer screens – which seem to offer unprecedented visions to us, yet often obscure our sight with dazzling ephemera." (p. 172)

The explosion of sports interest leading to a commercialization in a global sense is largely based on the increasingly pervasive position of media, especially TV. Live broadcasts, digital TV, and webcasts have all played part in creating this very widespread image of sports in western society. For most fans, the camera lens becomes their window into the world of sports—most Formula 1 fans today have only experienced the sport through television. Sport broadcasts thus, in a sense, create the sport. EA puts effectively this fact into practice when creating games. Almost all sport games present the game perspective from a TV broadcast point of view. Angles, panning, replays, camera positions, and broadcast graphics are meticulously imitated and re-created in the game environment. Even broadcast type commentary by well known experts, like John Madden, is included in games—everything to ensure a game experience as close as possible to the 'reality' experienced in front of the television. Large sums are invested to obtain the rights to use 'real world' franchises such as names and logos of sport series and leagues, e.g. NFL, NBA, and Formula 1. One of the most popular sport game publishers, Sega, have even bought the rights to use the US sport channel ESPN's name in conjunction with their sports games, further augmenting the importance of 'broadcast' like sport games.

The biggest difference between watching TV and playing computer games is the possibility (one could say requirement) of interaction. Without actively engaging with the game, the player will do rather poorly. EA sports use the lens to make this even more apparent. They create boxart that could be seen as a theoretical photograph (Barrett 1996), where the athlete comes through the lens to focus attention on the fact that this is not the passive, receptive TV-watching experience, but rather sports coming closer by breaking the invisible division [of the lens] between the now active player and athlete. This is a powerful way of taking the conventional hero portrayal to the next level and making the already active athlete even more active.

Virtual and Real

What are sports games really selling? Video and computer games, on a general level, are selling fun and play. Games are all about providing entertainment to their players. There are of course numerous ways, probably equally as many as there are games, to entertain players. General tendencies and types of games can be identified, resulting in different game genres such as action, sport, strategy, role player games among many others. Genres are ways of targeting different segments of the player audience. What all these genres and games have in common is, in our opinion, that they provide escapism. Games provide escapism through play and fun. Play becomes a method to escape reality by entering a new and computer generated reality. It's not about simulating a different world but in a sense creating a new world with its own logic. 'Real world' reality isn't the aim of computer games, but rather to provide a reality consistent within the framework of this new logic. This logic shifts from genre to genre: some games, e.g. role games, have the explicit purpose to create an immersing parallel world where players live a character's life, while other games, such as puzzle games, provide little of an 'alternative' world and instead create challenges that absorb the player's mind in an interesting and entertaining way. Games are about immersing the players with different forms of entertainment that creates an escape from reality.

Sport games are somewhere between logical games and immersive games. Sport games don't create an alternative world but instead let players enter a world that exists in reality (different sport series and leagues), mixing it with a fictitious and digital reality (Poole 1999). Sports have an important and influential position in society with many followers and a widespread image. Sport games are capitalizing on this by providing ways to get an even more immersive experience of the sport. Football games aren't only about 'playing' football but rather providing an interactive and playable version of football's image in society. Several sport games lacking ties with their 'real world' counterparts have failed in the market, the result being that most sports games today feature 'real' players and teams. The image of sport is thus not only about the sport activity in itself, but also the athletes, the teams, the series, the stadiums, the clothing, the sponsors, and many other surrounding aspects. As a result sport games have to recreate this image to achieve popularity and success. This is the essence of the allure created by sport games—the possibility to virtually play a 'real world' society phenomenon such as sports—a mix of virtual and real.

Method

Package Analysis

The visual analysis is inspired of Gilian Rose's (2001) *compositional interpretation* that gives a detailed vocabulary for expressing the appearance of an image taking into account the social context of the image production—in this case with a particular emphasis on the semiotic aspects of these covers. This is used together with the formal method proposed by Schroeder (2002) that treats images not merely as "nonverbal" information that convey more or less the

same message that text might impart, but rather that they constitute a system of representations—a visual language that is both engaging and deceptive.

Semiotics is a good tool for this kind of image analysis as it provides a framework for both the construction and decoding of meaning in images (cf. Schroeder 2002), as well as giving an understanding of the market drive towards general commodification (cf. Goldman and Papson 1996) as a common meaning structure is established. Semiotics centers around the sign, made up of the signifier, the perceptual component of the sign, and the signified, being the concept the signifier is relating to (Saussure and Bally 1966), or as put by Umberto Eco (1976, p. 6) "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign. A sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else." In the field of visual semiotics Roland Barthes (1973; 1977) sets the stage with the analytical layers *denotation*, who and what are the (kinds of) people, places and things depicted, and *connotation*, what ideas and values do we associate with these depicted people, places and things (Leeuwen 2001). The first layer of analysis is focused on describing the image as it is presented, without making interpretations of the depicted. An important tool in this is categorization, e.g. groups vs. individuals, distancing, and surrounding text, that combined give the level of individuality or stereotypification in the image. The connotative layer is basically the interpretive analysis of the established 'facts' of the image, with the two image elements, pose and objects, being more important than others (Barthes 1977).

Interviews

In order to elicit information about the gamers consumption pattern of the boxart, narrative interviews (Burawoy 1998) were used. Six respondents, all male, ranging in age from 18 to 35, were interviewed separately between just under an hour to an hour and a half. The sample was by no means random but consisted of more or less active gamers who all played sports games. This selection could be claimed to be insignificantly narrow, but this study is similar to Holt's (2002) that uses marginal groups to explore larger societal phenomenon. The interviews were semi-structured in order to cover both specifics about EA Sports game covers and the respondents' general game consumption patterns and their relation to sports in other forms than in games.

Study 1: American football games

Two American football games will be analyzed: *Madden NFL 2003* and *NFL Fever 2002*.

The cover of *Madden NFL 2003* (MN in short) is an example of a typical 'hero shot', considering it portrays only one person, most probably a (black) male American football athlete in a dramatic and 'positive' way. MN's cover presents the athlete in a dramatic, active and almost attacking pose. There are no other persons in this cover—the athlete is alone and the focus is only on his character.
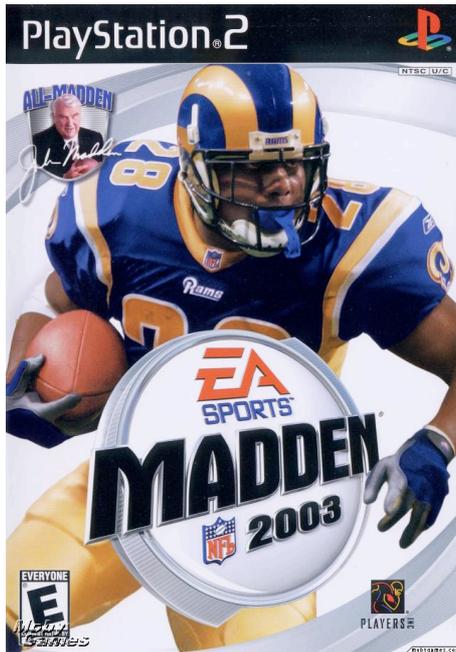
Figure 2: Madden NFL 2003
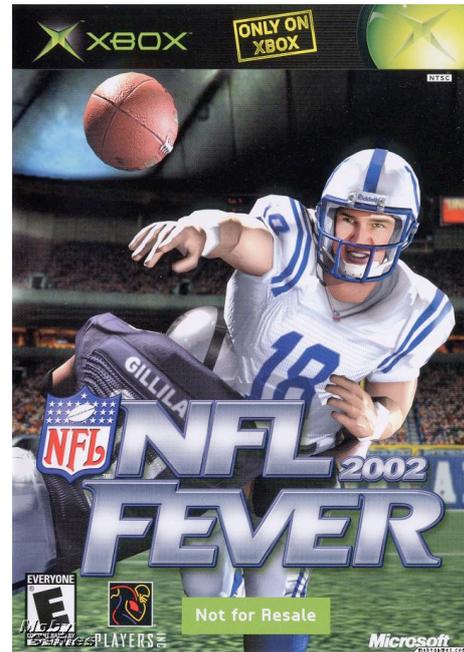
Figure 3: NFL Fever 2002

The athlete's image is active due to the general position of his body, arms and legs. His legs are stretched out to the left, his left arm is turned forward, his body is turned to the left while his head is turned to the right. All these elements signal activity. His legs are not in a 'standing' position, but rather as if he was running or jumping. The left arm is also in a position as though he was running. The turned body with the unnaturally large shoulders (due to the protection gear) enhances the effect of activity: the body has a diagonal composition that creates a perspective and is therefore more dynamic than a simple two-dimensional *en face* depiction.

The athlete seems to be attacking something. His eyes are firmly fixed on a target in the distance with his face turned in the same direction. His left arm is bent forward, protecting the rest of his body. His other arm strongly holds a characteristic (American) football in a very tight and protective manner. The helmet is signalizing the need for protection from a violent situation. Generally the man is depicted in an attacking, powerful and almost aggressive way.

The man is wearing a blue t-shirt with different texts, numbers and stripes. Blue is traditionally considered a 'male' color since men, and not women, in western civilizations have during the ages predominantly worn this color. 'Male' has traditionally been associated with active, aggressive, powerful and dynamic characteristics. This cover is no exception.

White is the background color and the overall dominating color of this image. It creates a contrast with the colorful (most probably) photograph of the athlete. This contrast puts the attention on the player. White can also be considered the color of sport since white clothing has been used by athletes ranging from Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda films to Wimbledon tennis players as well as traditional badminton, squash and golf players. White is the color of the pure, innocent, neutral, peaceful, light, calm and clean—or more generally sportsmanship.

The arcs in the background create a focus on the player. They have a 'radiating' effect—as if the athlete was radiating power and activity.

The circle, with the game title, is the focus of the entire MN cover. It represents the symbol and essence of this game. Circles focus, point and highlight. It is made three-dimensional, and powerful by the thick edges and lighting effects. They also create a sense of action, as they seem to be rotating on a pivot. White is, as in the rest of the cover, the dominating color of this circle. The circle's metal edges and their shape create allusions of a device—maybe a camera lens, sight or barrel? The texts and symbols in the circle are presented with a perspective. The title, 'MADDEN', is larger than the circle and is in front of it. This emphasizes the importance of this name in MN. A NFL (National Football League) symbol is in the circle. Fans recognize and trust this symbol, which clarifies why EA invests substantial resources to gain the rights to use this organizations name and symbol. The same applies to the John Madden image found in the upper left corner—the famous American sports commentator is trustworthy and identified with American football. A representation of his signature gives a personal touch as if John Madden personally approved it.

In NFL Fever 2002 (NF) there is a different approach. In this cover 'reality' has been chosen as the main theme. The cover shows a situation with two men and a stadium in the background that could theoretically be a 'real' situation. NF's cover isn't a photograph, which can be seen by the slightly unrealistic colors (especially the grass) and somewhat overall static appearance, it's rather made with computer graphics—are the manufacturers implying that the game has as good graphics as this cover? The almost 'real' looking, but still noticeable, computer graphics create a contrast with the 'reality' of the situation.

In NF several concepts similar to MN have been used. The first and most obvious similarity is the depiction of American football players 'in action'. In both cases a football is present. Generally both covers try to capture and highlight the essence of the sport, which is violent, male action. The difference is that MN uses a real photograph of a single player while NF uses a computer-generated image of a fictitious American football moment. Both covers generally emphasize action—in this cover it is a man throwing a ball, a second man is attacking the first man and making him almost falling over. The throwing of the ball towards the upper left corner connects the cover with the viewers since it creates the impression that the player is throwing the ball towards 'us'.

Some similar coloristics are used e.g. the main character, the player that throws the ball, is dressed in white. This color, again, is often associated with sports. He also wears some blue elements – similar to the athlete in NF. The title text ('NFL Fever 2002') is written in a metallic colored font. Silver colored metal can be associated with hi-tech (many mobile phones and consumer electronics use silver to gain this effect), exclusive (it resembles precious metals), and rugged (industrial engines). All these are characteristics that are desirable in association with this game. Metal is also used on the edges in the title logo of MN.

The background, with the large and crowded stadium, creates a feeling of space. It's fuzzy and only the players are in focus—exactly as in MN where the background is white only.

As in MN there are some common symbols, e.g. the NFL, ERPB and Players Inc. logos. The NFL logo creates a link between the fame of NFL and this game. ESRB has rated this game, which is important to many buyers of games (i.e. parents).

Generally both the MN and NF covers try to visually capture the essence of American football and create a link between this essence and the computer game. Both are using similar concepts to achieve this objective.

Study 2: Consumer interviews

In addition to talking about gaming in general, and finer tactical aspects of different sports games, the respondents centered their narratives around three main themes interesting to this study. The six respondents can be classified into three categories based on how much they play. Of the six respondents, three are quoted here. Adam is a 24 year old college student, who owns several consoles and more than 20 games. He is defined as a heavy gamer, partly because his long engagement with console gaming, and partly because he plays roughly one hour every day. Bruce is 35 years old professional, owning one console and 31 games. Bruce is in this study considered an engaged gamer playing four to five hours a week. The third category is the casual gamer, represented by Charlie, a 27 year old mid-level manager, owning a console and seven games. He plays a couple hours a month.

Although the respondents had similar opinions regarding actual covers, the differences between gamer types appear in the approach to gaming and games. Whereas Adam has a long relationship with different types of consoles, the others are only familiar with their current console. Adam's historical baggage results in a resistance against contemporary mainstream games, "I really don't like EA games, I actually prefer the Sega Series [sport games]", when asked why, "Well I come from the Dreamcast [the now defunct Sega game console] and I really liked their games." Adam, with his more intensive gaming style, has also formed special bonds to certain games and their packaging, "Sometimes I can just pick up a game [package] and look at it, remembering all the fun I had playing it." The package does not only act as an agent or face for the game, and its consumption is not limited to the point-of-sales, but recurrent throughout the lifespan of the game.

Charlie does not have the same strong opinion about different game developers, but is still heavily influenced by the genre defining characteristics of EA when looking for a new title, recognizing not only the brand, but also the participating athlete, "Usually I check out the game on the web, but I trust and recognize EA's sport game with the guy and the logo."

Sport stars in games

Athletes take a prominent place on most sports game covers, and the same is true in the consumers' minds, or as illustrated by Bruce "I buy a lot of [sport] games, sometimes it is even hard to remember which star came which year." There is an immediate relation between the star on the cover and the game itself, sometimes even stronger than the name of the game. The recognizable athlete does not only act as a face of the specific game s/he is on, but also as an enforcer of the sports game aesthetics.

None of the respondents had problems identifying neither the different game covers nor the name of the athlete. The role of the athlete differed between the respondents, where the casual gamers thought of them as a stamp of approval and a good way for knowing directly what kind of game it was, the heavy gamers had a more personal relation to the athletes, or as Adam puts it, "If Henry [famous French soccer player on the cover of EA FIFA 2004] is injured you have to change the entire team tactics."

Gaming and television

All respondents watch live games on TV in addition to playing the sports game. The gaming experience is deeply connected to watching the same type of event on television. There is, however, a difference in focus between the three types of respondents. Charlie is only interested in the "fun" parts of sports with lots of action, "[Games] should be just like watching a exciting game on TV, but you control one of the teams." While the responents who played more thought that the television perspective was important as well, they also had a more demanding view of the game. Perhaps cynical, they really wanted the most common television experience, according to Bruce, "Sometimes you play a boring nil-nil game just like on TV. It can't all be fun with score opportunities all the time." There is a tension between the seductive action laiden image of the boxart, and the striving to get something that by the casual gamer could be described as boring.

Realism in games

The reality of sports games made a lot of the respondents confused when talking about certain aspects of gaming. When talking about the different players, the difference between game and reality became blurred, as when Adam talks about Henry, there really is no difference between the representation of the player in the game and the player on television. The same is true with the statement of boring matches; playing in some sense gives enjoyment even though the actual match is boring—it is the escape into a world of extremely micromanaging coaches that gives the pleasure if not the actual gaming itself.

Conclusions

The widespread notion that packaging is only interesting in terms of protecting the innards from the environment during transportation and lure consumers to pick them off crammed shelves in supermarkets is far from true. Packaging can be seen as aesthetics objects deeply interrelated to cultural flows in the same way as other forms of cultural artifacts, such as art. The imaging communicates not only within the realm of packages, but also, as shown here, with as disparate discourses as the centuries old hero myth and relatively new broadcast television. Alongside this "internal" interaction, the packaging is also an integral part of the consumption experience. This is especially true in the case of computer games and other similar more experience-oriented goods that are consumed multiple times.

The aesthetics of sport games' boxart is affected by the strong influence of broadcast television in the games. The boxart has to, in a simplified way, 'represent' the content inside, and sell the actual game. One image has to contain the entire game experience, consisting of hours of gameplay and thousands of images. Boxart is in that sense the essence of games. When considering sport game covers, we have identified several common features across the genre. Almost all covers have a limited number of athletes, always portrayed actively performing the sport, as can be seen in the previously described case of American football game covers. The athletes are predominantly depictions of known profiles within the sport. Furthermore their pose expresses power, control and action, hence a traditional male heroic sports stereotype. There is also a connection to the broadcast characteristics of sport games in the EA Sports' logo with its round 'camera lens' shape. One could argue that the EA Sports logo symbolizes the players' gaze into the game through the lens of a television camera, while the second 'lens', in the background, breaks the conventional barrier between audience and athlete, thus creating a tension between well-known [TV] and dynamic unknown [gameplay] elements in sports games.

While the intersection of package design, video games and consumption is still very much open for further research, this analysis has shown that packaging play an important role in the consumption experience. The approach to juxtapose visual analysis with game consumption has proven to be a fruitful inroad to further the understanding of game consumption and the area between virtual and real.

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Pink Machine is the name of a research project currently carried out at the Department of Industrial Economics and Management at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. It aims to study the often forgotten non-serious driving forces of technical and economical development. We live indeed in the reality of the artificial, one in which technology has created, constructed and reshaped almost everything that surrounds us. If we look around us in the modern world, we see that it consists of things, of artefacts. Even the immaterial is formed and created by technology - driven by the imperative of the economic rationale.

As Lev Vygotsky and Susanne Langer have pointed out, all things around us, all these technological wonders, have their first origin in someone's fantasies, dreams, hallucinations and visions. These things, which through their demand govern local and global economical processes, have little to do with what we usually regard as "basic human needs". It is rather so, it could be argued, that the economy at large is governed by human's unbounded thirst for jewellery, toys and entertainment. For some reason - the inherent urge of science for being taken seriously, maybe - these aspects have been recognised only in a very limited way within technological and economical research.

The seriousness of science is grey, Goethe said, whereas the colour of life glows green. We want to bring forward yet another colour, that of frivolity, and it is pink.

The Pink Machine Papers is our attempt to widen the perspective a bit, to give science a streak of pink. We would like to create a forum for half-finished scientific reports, of philosophical guesses and drafts. We want thus to conduct a dialogue which is based on current research and which gives us the opportunity to present our scientific ideas before we develop them into concluding and rigid - grey - reports and theses.

Finally: the name "Pink Machine" comes from an interview carried out in connection with heavy industrial constructions, where the buyer of a diesel power plant worth several hundred million dollars confessed that he would have preferred his machines to be pink.

Claes Gustafsson
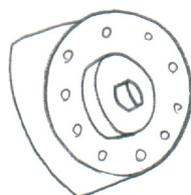
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