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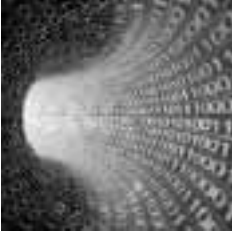
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Wii has never been modern: ‘active’ video games and the ‘conduct of conduct’

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Abstract

This article considers the role of ‘active’ video games – specifically the Nintendo ‘Wii’ – as technologies that foster control over corporeality. New media scholars have examined the politics of embodiment and hybridity as they relate to video games, yet have paid limited attention to the ways in which new gaming technologies might contribute to contemporary systems of ‘government’, or what Foucault calls the ‘conduct of conduct’. Borrowing from influential social theorists, the article argues that, by undergoing what Latour labels ‘translation’ (by merging with the body), the Wii invokes and reinscribes governmental and post-disciplinary rationalities. The analysis concludes by contending that the Wii might be a particularly influential innovation in risk-based post-disciplinary societies: rather than connecting ‘at-risk’ subjects to human experts, the Wii functions as an active and autonomous quasi-object risk expert, able to diagnose ‘problematic’ tendencies and prescribe basic behavioural remedies.

Key words

governmentality • hybridity • post-discipline • risk knowledge • the body • translation • video games

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of scholarly debate on the topic of digital media. The study of video games in particular has become a burgeoning field of inquiry, a trend encapsulated in the claim that video game research is 'the hottest and most volatile field of study within new media theory' (Wolf and Perron, 2003: 1). Among the many topics of interest to video game scholars, embodiment has become a central focus for theorists and empirical researchers alike (e.g. Baerg, 2007; Behrenshausen, 2007; Gee, 2008; Lahti, 2003). This no doubt stems from the emergence of the body as a principal concern across a range of scholarly disciplines (Shilling, 2007), and from the fact that carnal experiences are central to the consumption of new digital technologies (Lahti, 2003). Indeed, in blurring the distinctions between people and machines, new media have demanded reconsideration of the ontological status afforded to humans, and have created a need for renewed epistemological approaches. Lahti (2003) contends that video games in particular have challenged the hegemony of audiovisual understandings of new media. Gaming technologies, in Lahti's view, are the paradigmatic site for human/non-human transgression and hybridity, for both body and technology are absorbed in a 'cybernetic continuum' with consumption of these devices.

This article explores the politics of hybridity and embodiment as they relate to video games, with a focus on the ways in which new video game systems potentially foster variegated forms of surveillance and control. Despite a prevailing interest in the transgression of boundaries that separate people and machines, video game scholars have yet to investigate the ways in which human/non-human hybridity might permit control over corporeality. It takes up this issue with an examination of Nintendo's new 'Wii' video game innovation. Although the interest of this article lies with this technology in particular, it suggests that the Wii might signal new trends in the use of 'active' video games – a term bestowed upon games that engender human activity in the form of physical exercise – for the supervision and management of consumer bodies. The analysis is predicated primarily on Latour's (1993, 1999, 2005) foundational works on hybridity and Foucault's (1994, 1997) influential notion of governmentality. However, it also draws from theorists who have provided important updates to Foucault's *oeuvre* based on the contemporary salience of risk politics and the prominence of sophisticated information and entertainment technologies (Deleuze, 1995; Rabinow, 1996). The article assembles these works in order to contend that, by way of its intimate connections with the body, the Wii is a device that potentially serves to 'conduct the conduct' of individuals and groups. Specifically, the Wii has the ability to invoke and reinscribe the particularities of both governmental (Foucault, 1994, 1997) and post-disciplinary (Rabinow, 1996) control. Influenced by Latour's exhortations towards recognizing the agency

of non-humans, the analysis concludes by arguing that the Wii might be a particularly influential innovation: rather than merely connecting 'at-risk' subjects with human experts, the Wii behaves as an autonomous quasi-object risk expert, able to diagnose risk tendencies and prescribe basic behavioural remedies. In this regard, the term 'active' video game takes on new meaning, signalling not only the activity of human users, but also the agency of the Wii itself.

THE NINTENDO WII

The Wii can be categorized within the family of 'exergames' or 'active' technologies that induce dynamic physical movements from their users (The Economist, 2007). The innovativeness of the Wii lies primarily with the landmark Wii Remote controller, a wireless device held by the player which translates somatic movements onto a video screen. Upon its release, Nintendo heralded the Wii as a technology which could transcend the traditional videogaming preserve of males aged 18 to 24 (Nintendo E3, 2007; also see Ms.Nintendo-Europe, 2007). This redressing of gender and age disparities in consumption was to be realized in part through a focus on health and the body, as health promotion was viewed by Nintendo as a theme around which families might convene (Nintendo E3, 2007; Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that sport-based games which activate the sporting body were made available to Wii consumers.

Although some in the media have observed that these games might serve as exercise tools (e.g. Pogue, 2006), Nintendo's adoption (or commodification) of health promotion was not realized fully until the release of 'Wii Fit'. As with the Wii games, fitness-oriented Wii Fit activities (e.g. yoga, dance) operate by developing a cybernetic continuum that synchronizes 'real' and 'virtual' bodies. Wii Fit supplements the original Wii console with the Wii Fit Balance Board: a wireless platform that is sensitive to the slightest of movements, such as shifting one's weight while standing upright on the board. It also features software that enables users to record and track bodily measurements such as Body Mass Index (BMI), a weight-to-height statistic (see Nintendo, 2008b).

Following the release of the Wii, and again with the unveiling of Wii Fit, Nintendo made available lengthy interviews with company workers who were integral to the development of these technologies. These discussions were lead by company President Satoru Iwata – hence the series title, 'Iwata Asks' – and were posted online (Nintendo, 2008a; Us.wii, 2008). The analysis in this article draws to a great extent from this series. Specifically, following researchers who argue that internet materials can be studied with the use of conventional qualitative methods (Gillett, 2003; Hine, 2000), the 'Iwata Asks' documents were treated as textual artefacts and subjected to multiple

critical readings. Initial readings were made with the goal of developing general knowledge about the Wii and Wii Fit. Subsequent readings involved coding for themes related to hybridity and governmentality: for example, how ideologies of health and the body seemed to inform labour practices, or how Nintendo imagined the Wii would merge with the consumer body. The study also searched for news sources (e.g. BBC News, 2008) and English-language websites that provide additional information on the Wii (e.g. Nintendo, 2008b, 2008c; Nintendo E3, 2007; Getupandplay, 2008). These sites were also treated as texts and coded for the aforementioned themes.¹

It is difficult to judge with certainty the influence of 'Iwata Asks' among various audiences. It can be argued that Nintendo at least sought a diversity of gamers with this series, since many of the themes emphasized by company workers – healthy living, exercise and familial relationships – are themes that Nintendo apparently deems vital to expanding gaming markets. Moreover, while video game companies have long attracted gamers by publishing esoteric game information through various media outlets (e.g. magazines, see Kline et al., 2003), Wii-related websites generally and the 'Iwata Asks' documents specifically provide basic 'how to' information that is likely to appeal to novices as well. However, it is notable that 'Iwata Asks' received little attention in the mainstream press (despite countless reports on the Wii itself), while the gaming sites that are geared towards dedicated video game audiences (e.g. Gamespy.com, 2008) covered and provided links to these documents. Despite Nintendo's best efforts, then, it is likely that existing video game users were exposed in greater numbers to 'Iwata Asks' than new consumer demographics.

Although it is important to consider the audiences that these sites might attract, ultimately the goal of this research was to explore how the ideologies and practices of Nintendo potentially influenced the development of the Wii, and how this impacts, and possibly delimits, the ways in which this commodity eventually will be interpreted and 'used'. The reliance on Nintendo documents in this research – documents that provide a partial and explicitly optimistic perspective on how the Wii will work – no doubt limits the scope of this analysis, precluding a thorough account of how Wii users engage with this commodity in what are surely reflexive and strategic ways. However, this analysis provides a particular perspective by considering 'active' video games as governmental devices, a perspective that is largely absent from the literature, and offers one contribution to a broader knowledge project towards understanding these technologies.

LATOUR AND THE ACTIVE QUASI-OBJECT

A theme that connects Latour's (1993, 1999, 2005) numerous meditations on hybridity is that humans and non-humans are brought together necessarily

through what he calls 'translation'. Technologies emerge to a great extent through the machinations of human producers, and as such the agency of people is translated, absorbed or 'folded in' to non-humans. Translation also involves processes whereby technologies are reintegrated into the body (often during consumption), creating changes in the human body and psyche, and fostering new iterations of subjectivity. Like Haraway (1991), Latour portrays the boundaries of humanity and technology as permeable: humans are continuously 'nested' or translated into non-humans; non-humans, in return, permeate the body politic and the individual body.

This confluence of people and technologies enables Latour to bypass the binary logic of objectivity/subjectivity debates. 'Pure' subjects and objects are replaced in his schema by hybrid bodies and quasi-objects. Moreover, it buttresses Latour's contention that both humans and non-humans serve as 'mediators' endowed with agency. It is commonplace to recognize agency in human behaviour, yet it is rather unconventional to do the same for non-human technologies. However, through their convergence with people, technologies transcend mere passive transmission of information and (like people) serve to actively *transform* the connotations that are relevant to any given context (Latour, 2005). These transformations in meaning (or 'mediations') can manifest in myriad ways: 'interference', for example, occurs when a mediator (non-human or human) intervenes in a context to cause a shift in the existing 'program of action'; 'composition' involves articulations of numerous mediators en route to a final goal (Latour, 1999).

No doubt owing to the rarity with which non-humans are seen to have agency, Latour supports these conjectures with practical applications. The speed bump is an instructive case (Latour, 1999). The non-human speed bump emerges through the associations of people and various technologies (i.e. through 'composition'). The ultimate goal or program of action of these collaborations is to slow traffic to safeguard surrounding pedestrians – thus the speed bump appeals to drivers' 'morality, enlightened disinterest, and reflection' (Latour, 1999: 186). Once implemented, it is likely that this goal will be realized (i.e. traffic is slowed), but, given the shape of the speed bump, drivers may in fact decelerate only to preserve the underside of their vehicles. Thus the speed bump successfully 'interferes' in the context of the roadway, but in so doing, it transforms the meanings surrounding drivers' behaviour: an original moral injunction is replaced by rather selfish motives. In this sense, for Latour, the speed bump actively mediates meaning.

Mediation, then, can be defined as an expression of agency from humans or non-humans that transforms meaning (Latour, 1999); translation is a relation that brings mediators into coexistence (Latour, 2005). In *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour, 1993), translation and mediation are seen as central practices upon which western modernity is predicated. Although

translation is ubiquitous, the ‘modernizers’ – a group that includes a litany of canonized philosophers and scientists – have sought to deny translation by disentangling and partitioning nature and culture. Latour argues that this is evident in the work of researchers who have aimed to divide ‘the symbolic’ domain of meaning from the natural world of ‘things’ (2005: 83). It is also apparent in mundane and trivial ‘events’ (e.g. the division of science, politics, culture and so on in daily newspapers; see Latour, 1993). Latour deems the modern, taxonomic desire to be both tyrannical (in that it has been propagated dogmatically) and disingenuous (in that it belies the ubiquity of translation). Yet it is also ironic: paradoxically, the efforts of modernizers to separate people from technologies has enabled human/non-human imbroglis to flourish, largely in that people have *employed* technologies so as to *separate* them from the ‘pure’ human body. With this claim, Latour’s history of modernity approximates a repression hypothesis (Foucault, 1978) of people and machines: by denying translation, the modernizers inadvertently triggered a discursive and material explosion of hybrids. This brings clarity to the title of Latour’s (1993) foundational text. If modernity is based on the separation of people and technologies, then in fact we have never been modern.

Indeed, in what follows this article will argue that the Wii exemplifies this confluence of people and machines. Specifically, the Wii undergoes various forms of translation (both interference and composition) in its encounters with human workers and consumers. Much like the speed bump, this ultimately renders the Wii a device that transforms meaning: in this case, the meanings associated with video game use.

WII HAS NEVER BEEN MODERN

In the first instance, ‘Iwata Asks’ suggests that the Wii emerged through various amalgamations of human and non-human ‘mediators’. Indeed, the Wii’s existence stems from the machinations of human producers – as Latour says, technologies are ‘congealed’ labour (1999: 189) – and from an array of smaller, constituent technologies. Nintendo general manager Genyo Takeda succinctly describes this relationship between people and technologies as a ‘human–machine interface’ (Nintendo, 2008a, volume 1, part 1). This relationship is perhaps best exemplified in the development of the venerated Wii Remote controller. Nintendo worker Akio Ikeda describes how the Remote manifested through the attempts of (active) labourers to harness the powers of (equally active) technologies:

In the early stages of development we ran into a number of problems that we hadn’t anticipated, like the fact that the controller would react to fluorescent light, for example. Creating a mechanism that prevents the controller from responding to fluorescent light and sunlight may sound like low-profile activities, but it still gave us a lot to work on. (Nintendo, 2008a, Volume 2, Part 3)

Ikeda essentially describes a partnership between people and technologies – the ‘human–machine interface’ – where humans who ‘create’ and non-humans that ‘react’ or ‘prevent’ are folded together. This, in Latour’s (1999) vernacular, is mediation by composition, as it involves the assembling of numerous active mediators in order to achieve a specific outcome.

These labour processes are significant in that Nintendo’s products (the Remote, the Wii Fit Balance Board) facilitate what it describes as precise virtual representations of human movement: ‘The Wii Balance Board is more than just a scale – it can read your real-life movements and bring them to life on screen, just like the Wii Remote controller’ (Nintendo, 2008b, ‘What is Wii Fit’). However, such virtual simulacra are realized only when translation occurs yet again: in this instance when the Wii interferes in human activity, transgressing the imaginary boundaries that divide people and technologies and folding into the consumer body. When designing the Wii, Nintendo imagined the game’s Remote might intervene by folding surreptitiously into the body: ‘[W]hen playing a game, the nearest thing to the player is the controller. The controller should therefore be regarded as an extension of the player rather than as part of the console’ (Nintendo, 2008a, volume 2, part 1). The Wii Fit’s Balance Board makes similar somatic linkages. Software developer Takao Sawano labels this innovation a ‘controller used with the feet’ (Us.wii, 2008, volume 2, part 4). Meanwhile, product developer Takeshi Nagareda expounds on how sensitive it is to fluctuations in body weight and human movement. Nintendo workers were issued with two demands:

The first was that the Wii Board had to be able to measure the daily changes in a person’s weight. If a person drank some juice and gained 200g, the Wii Board needed to be accurate enough to be able to detect that change. The other demand was that it had to be able to detect the shift in a person’s balance ... the Wii Board needed to be able to send 60 signals a second to report the shifting balance of the user. (Us.wii, 2008, volume 2, part 3)

This sophisticated sensory capacity contributes to the simulation of ‘real’ sporting movements. In ‘Iwata Asks’, software developer Katsuya Eguchi expresses pride over the verisimilitude rendered with Nintendo’s product: ‘[T]hese games have been designed so that when a person who has actually played the sport picks up the controller, they can tell how similar the game is to the actual sport’ (Nintendo, 2008a, volume 4, part 3). Wii games seek to bolster this blurring of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ spaces with authentic visual and auditory signals. Players can construct personalized avatars (called ‘Miis’) that represent their movements on-screen. Although the Miis have a cartoonish aesthetic, and thus deviate from recent trends in video games towards ‘authentic’ identity representations, they at once evoke realism in that they can be tailored to mirror the player’s ‘actual’ (or perceived) appearance

(Nintendo, 2008c, 'Mii Channel'). The acoustics of Wii games evoke realism as well: 'If you're shaking during the Half Moon pose' in Wii Fit Yoga, for example, a virtual trainer 'might respond with helpful tips on how to calm down with deep breathing' (Nintendo, 2008b, 'Training').

The Wii also represents corporeality statistically, another way of 'merging' with the body. It can be argued that it is with this form of representation that Nintendo's health focus is most apparent. 'We thought that the Wii would be a device that would be placed in the living room,' notes a company spokesperson in a video posted online, 'And the one subject we felt we had to have in order to achieve this was health' (Nintendo E3, 2007; also see Ms.Nintendo-Europe, 2007). Thus a number of software tools enable players to gauge their physical fitness. Wii Fit impels gamers to take an initial 'Body Test' comprising a series of 'objective' calculations (BMI, center of balance) aimed at determining their overall 'Wii Fit Age' (Nintendo, 2008b, 'Body Test'). The supposed need to take account of this measure implies that it improves upon, if not fully supplants, chronological age as a determinant of one's health. Thus the Wii intervenes at the site of the body with the apparent aim of providing a more accurate corporeal diagnosis than even the most established and seemingly incontrovertible real-life statistics. Indeed, Wii Fit Age, unlike chronological age, can *decrease* over time, and thus individuals are encouraged to track their progress with the help of health measures and graphing technologies (e.g. BMI graphs; Nintendo, 2008b). These codified representations of corporeality work in concert with visual depictions of the body: changes in a player's weight (and thus BMI), for example, engender corresponding vacillations in the size of their virtual avatar (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5).

Thus the Wii is imbued initially with human agency and various constituent technologies during production, and ultimately reintegrates with the consumer body in various ways. The eventual ties that develop between player and machine surely elicit a range of emotional and experiential consequences (e.g. pleasure, pain), not least because active humans can engage with the Wii in diverse ways (this issue is revisited in the conclusion). Importantly, one potential consequence is that the Wii creates new articulations of technology-mediated control.

FROM SOVEREIGNTY TO GOVERNMENTALITY

Foucault's (1994, 1997) concept of governmentality is useful in conceptualizing how the Wii may contribute to the administration of consumer bodies. Rather than a centrifugal state apparatus, 'government' in Foucault's scholarship encompasses all practices involved in the 'conduct of conduct'. Under conditions of sovereignty, state repression served as the *modus operandi* for control of the populace (witness the monarch's right to take life or let live). With governmentality, control is dispersed throughout

the body politic; the subject is governed through a constellation of techniques that emanate both from remote loci of power and from individual subjects themselves. Thus repression is complemented by other rationalities: for example, disciplinary interventions aimed at reshaping corporeality, or calls for personal responsabilization over matters such as health (see Foucault, 1977, 1986). The broad goal of these articulations is to connect a politics of the singular body (i.e. 'anatamo-politics') to a biopolitics that aims to police and sustain life for the broader population. With the advent of governmentality, says Foucault, 'the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death' (1978: 138; emphasis in original).

In an instructive passage, Foucault describes anatamo-politics and biopolitics as 'two poles of development' that are 'linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations' (1978: 139). Technologies imbued with measuring and statistical capabilities have long been important components in this 'cluster of relations': 'Thought becomes governmental when it's linked to a technology' (Rose, 2000: 145). This is most evident with statistics that are administered to identify, measure and control the nation-state: for example, census measures. Indeed, in Foucault's schema, 'population' refers primarily to state-level social bodies. A common product of these techniques is the transformation of subjects into 'calculable people', that is, people who employ statistics to understand subjectivity and to bolster practices of reflexive self-monitoring (Rose, 1999).

Although Foucault's focus on historical antecedents left him conspicuously silent on the social impacts of contemporary information technologies (Haggerty, 2006), his analytics paved the way for an extensive body of literature on the technologies of government (Burchell et al., 1991, Rabinow, 1996; Rose, 2001). However, a notable gap in this work is the role of video games in contemporary strategies of surveillance and control.

VIDEO GAMES AND THE CONDUCT OF CONDUCT

Given the growing sophistication of video game consoles, as well as ongoing efforts from gaming companies to reach new consumer demographics, this is a significant elision. Through myriad features that both discipline the body and encourage responsibility, the Wii connects anatamo-political concerns (specifically over individual fitness) with biopolitical anxieties over the wellness of the population as a whole. In effect, the Wii invokes and thus fortifies a governmental form of control.

The body-machine continuum that is constructed in one's engagement with the Wii can be seen as enabling a disciplinary force to be exerted over the body. Certainly not all Wii games function in this manner, yet 'Iwata Asks' suggests that the disciplining of corporeality was important to Nintendo producers, and that disciplinary control was incorporated in

numerous gaming features. Wii Sports games appropriate movements from the repertoire of 'real' athletics (a domain associated with disciplinary power; see Markula and Pringle, 2006), thus eliciting a wide range of highly specified and efficient bodily activities. As noted, the Nintendo producers take pride in their rendering of a sporting simulacrum where players experiment with kinaesthetic movements to achieve maximum similitude with 'real' athletics (Nintendo, 2008a, volume 4, part 3). They also note how Wii activities potentially contribute to the construction of compliant or docile subjectivities. For example, worker Toru Minegishi used the Wii Fit to rectify faults with his center of balance: '[A]s I continued to play Wii Fit on a daily basis, I managed to bring my center of balance to the center of my body' (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5). Indeed, the Wii Fit features many disciplinary tools of this sort. For example, the game's virtual trainers reproach participants failing to maintain consistent levels of activity. As Yohei Miyagawa says:

[T]he trainers will keep an eye on your movements, so if you get off the Wii Board in the middle of an exercise and slack off, the trainer will notice and tell you off or ask you to come back. (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5)

Discipline in this instance takes on a distinctively surveillant character. Specifically, docility is achieved in processes that resemble what Smith labels 'panhaptic' control (SportsBabel, 2007). Smith argues that the electronic chips affixed to the shoes of marathon runners create striated spaces that allow for remote surveillance and administration of subjects. In this instance, the (hybrid) subject is 'seen' by the virtual trainer through the tactile conjoining of flesh and technology at the site of the balance board. This tactile vision permits not only control over activity, but also an awareness and control over patterns of inactivity; the gaze of the Wii identifies disruptions in the body-machine continuum and perceives these ruptures as (unwarranted) rest.

These features that work towards the creation of disciplined corporeality are complemented by the promotion of already-disciplined bodies in the Wii software. This implies that ascetic devotion to a Wii regimen will lead to ideal corporeality for video game consumers. The uses of media to champion lean, muscled and gender appropriate bodies are well documented (MacNeill, 1998; Markula and Pringle, 2006). Wii Fit in particular ascribes cultural currency to such images of the body. For example, its virtual trainers are lean and well-muscled, and approximate a real human figure in their depiction (Nintendo, 2008b, 'Training'). This verisimilitude is significant: it draws stark contrasts with alternate representations of subjectivity in Wii games (namely the cartoonish 'Miis'), thus exacerbating the trainers' role as luminaries of physical culture.

To activate the sporting body, these disciplinary features are paired with techniques promoting personal responsibility. The measuring technologies embedded in the Wii represent the material body in a variety of ways,

encouraging reflexive self-monitoring over corporeality. The fluctuations in shape and size of the player's virtual reflection (i.e. 'Mii') provide immediate and constant updates on her real bodily appearance. Distortions in the Mii's aesthetic are based primarily on the user's weight, as we learn from designer Yoshiyuki Oyama:

I've designed the Mii's figure to change depending on the changes in your own weight. As you continue recording your weight, you'll be able to watch the changes in your Mii's figure at a sped-up rate. (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5)

This kind of interaction constructs a feedback loop that allocates rewards based on ascetic self-monitoring. Oyama continues:

I hope you'll weigh yourself every day so you can experience this feature for yourself. I believe this is the kind of game where you'll keep making new discoveries as you continue playing. Your reward for your dedication, of course, is watching your Mii lose weight. (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5)

By generating corporeal discoveries of this sort, the Wii is portrayed as indispensable in the process of (literally) weighing one's bodily successes. BMI graphs similarly create 'calculable people' (Rose, 1999) who take responsibility for health and corporeality, as these diagrammatic representations reflect the user's adherence to an exercise regimen. In 'Iwata Asks' we learn that some features promoting responsibility emerged from the personal experiences of Nintendo workers, such as graphing technologies born out of general manager Shigeru Miyamoto's own successes with recording and monitoring his personal weight changes (Us.wii, 2008, volume 1, part 1).

Although initially directed at the singular body, the above-described disciplinary and responsibility-promoting technologies also evoke (and ostensibly seek to redress) concerns over population health. The Wii's measuring features perhaps best exemplify such biopolitical motivations. For example, BMI is an individual statistic that exists only in relation to a population norm, as one's BMI score is categorized based on its proximity to what is deemed 'normal' across the population. However, this categorization is dynamic: for example, the scores that define a person as obese have changed over time (Gard and Wright, 2005), showing this measure to be based on a mutable and reflexive understanding of what is a healthy individual and a healthy population. Thus the BMI measure subjects the individual body to a sweeping and homogenizing force: bodies are treated *en masse* so as to render a population filled with identical, 'healthy' and 'normal' bodies.

In addition, a commodified biopolitics materializes in Nintendo's promotion of the Wii. According to Nintendo, the Wii was constructed in part to satiate the company's desire to see widespread improvements in health and physical fitness. This is illustrated in the 'Iwata Asks' section heading

'A Wish for *Everyone* to Become Healthy' (Us.wii, 2008, volume 4, part 5; emphasis added). At the very least, Nintendo's commodification of health-promotion tools (e.g. BMI) and health-based ideologies can be viewed as an attempt to capitalize on the currency of health issues (such as overweight and obesity) that are of concern to many state-level governing bodies. The myriad country-specific webpages that have been developed for both the Wii and Wii Fit indicate further that these technologies are thought to be appropriate for biopolitical interventions in numerous states.

Studies charting the global circuits of cultural commodities (e.g. Carrington and Wilson, 2002) indicate that the Wii is likely to articulate with the politics of health in a unique fashion in each of these countries. The website Getupandplay (2008) encourages Canadian families to take the 'Wii Challenge', which involves regular engagement with kinetic Wii activities. This commodification of physical activity perfectly complements state initiatives to motivate what is perceived often as an increasingly unhealthy population. Health promotion strategies in Canada – for example, the contentious 'Active Living' program that emphasizes personal responsibility (Bercovitz, 2000) – rely increasingly upon neo-liberal strategies of government where the onus for maintaining health and physical activity rests squarely with the individual consumer. Similarly, a politico-economic climate that trades on the particularities of neo-liberalism can be found in the USA. The privatization of health care in America has driven service providers to employ market strategies for survival, and health care patients to behave as responsible health consumers (Henderson and Petersen, 2002; King, 2006). Under these material and discursive conditions – conditions that, as Harvey (2005) and others point out, are beset by class-based inequalities – health-oriented commodities become tools for upholding one's status as a responsible citizen. As costly consumer technologies, no doubt fitness-oriented games will reach the market disproportionately. Even if the Wii were made affordable to the point where it might transcend class divisions, nonetheless it represents a system that operates through the growing commodification of health care services. In Foucault's (1978) estimation, historically, the deployment of particular discourses (e.g. Victorian sexuality) has served as a mechanism for the self-affirmation of dominant classes. The dissemination of neo-liberal discourses of health and citizenship supports, and is supported by, the circulation of consumer health technologies such as the Wii. It can be argued that this articulation of ideology and material commodity similarly reaffirms and naturalizes class-based authority.

RISK POLITICS, POST-DISCIPLINE AND THE QUASI-OBJECT EXPERT

While Foucault's analytics provide insights into the politicized conditions in which the Wii operates, they do not account for the new rationalities which have emerged alongside more traditional forms of governmentality.

Rabinow builds from Foucault's work to illustrate how 'the two poles of the body and the population are being rearticulated into what could be called a post-disciplinary rationality' (1996: 91; cf. Castel, 1981). Rabinow's work is particularly informative for showing how risk politics have engendered novel social arrangements and forms of control. Direct therapeutic intervention, he argues, has been supplanted to a great extent by 'a preventive administrative management of populations at risk' (1996: 100): that is, 'expertise' is deployed primarily to attend pre-emptively to those predisposed to 'problematic' conditions or behaviours. Furthermore, greater emphasis is placed on the discrete elements of the body – a fragmentary anatomo-politics – rendering the subject a 'sum of diverse factors amenable to analysis by specialists' (1996: 100). These somewhat new articulations of anatomo-politics are complemented by a shifting biopolitical terrain. Overlapping community networks, especially 'risk' communities, increasingly function as the loci of government, thus shifting the focus of biopolitics away from the state population as a whole (Rose, 1996).

Rose similarly acknowledges the contemporary source of risk. He defines risk as 'a family of ways of thinking and acting, involving calculations about probable futures in the present followed by interventions into the present in order to control that potential future' (2001: 7). Although risk knowledge has long been present (often implicitly) in the policing of public health, health promotion increasingly involves the convergence of risk awareness and administrative systems of surveillance and responsibility promotion (Fusco, 2006; Petersen and Lupton, 1996). Of course, Foucault-inspired scholars of government are not alone in taking interest in the political economy of risk. Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990) find common ground on many aspects of contemporary risk societies, including the assumption that technological inventions (and interventions) heighten social anxieties by creating a diversity of potential futures (Giddens, 1999). Modernity is positioned paradoxically as both a solution to, and the cause of, social ills, creating conditions of reflexive modernity where social actors seek to improve their existence while minimizing ever-present risks (Giddens, 1990).

Similarly, Deleuze (1995) documents the shifting governmental landscape and its new modalities of technological interpellation. Modern technologies, Deleuze points out, have the capacity to 'see' specific elements of the body or isolated social behaviours in ways previously unimaginable. This enables the mediation of subjectivity through codes or passwords: that is, through weighted alpha-numerical values that define aspects of the individual. 'We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual,' he says, highlighting, like Rabinow, how the twin poles of anatomo- and biopolitics have changed, 'Individuals become *'dividuals'*, and masses become samples, data, markets, or *"banks"*' (Deleuze, 1995: 180; emphasis in original). In effect, contemporary subjects and communities are imagined and called upon through strategies

that reproduce corporeality with highly specific codified language. Passwords become mechanisms for unlocking knowledge of the self.

While serving to conduct the conduct of individuals and groups in ways defined by Foucault, the Wii also potentially functions as a post-disciplinary technology by harnessing and intensifying the trepidation that surrounds risk communities and personal risk behaviours or anatomies. This is first apparent in the Wii's deployment in risk communities, for example, youth communities of physical education. The notion that youth are susceptible to morbidity is prevalent in most western states, having invaded institutional programs and everyday parlance (McDermott, 2007). Entertainment technologies, including video games, are often considered among the chief culprits contributing to the ubiquity of 'deviant' youth bodies (see Gard and Wright, 2005). Physical education (PE) is perhaps the paradigmatic site for interventions that mobilize obesity epidemic discourses. Although western PE programs originated primarily as disciplinary sites (Kirk, 2004), strategies of risk reduction have become central to PE administration (Gard and Wright, 2004). Schools in Worcestershire, England have encouraged health promotion among youth with a program that promotes physical activity through virtual Wii exercises. Despite protests from health advocacy groups, this initiative was supported by government officials (receiving a national school sport award), and was deemed a success by policymakers (BBC News, 2008; Cooper, 2008). This latter group rationalized that the Wii would reach those lacking physical education, and thus by implication, those most at risk: 'The program specifically targeted children who missed out on physical education, as well as those who opted out of participating in after-school clubs' (Physical and Health Education Canada, 2008).

Although this type of intervention has yet to be popularized in PE, elsewhere educators are experimenting with other active technologies such as the video game 'Dance Dance Revolution' (BBC News, 2006). Whether successful or not, these programs are significant in that they contribute to a growing discourse that assumes both the at-risk status of youth communities and the ability of active technologies to administrate health and physical activity. Given the longstanding belief that entertainment technologies promote sedentary lifestyles, these initiatives can be regarded as modern, reflexive solutions to the risks ushered in with modernity (Giddens, 1990). In spite of their growing influence, there is limited information on these programs. The literature would benefit from research that explores how consumption of technologies such as the Wii in public contexts mirrors or departs from the uses of these devices in the home. While strategic and creative consumption is certainly possible in both contexts, there is a history of measuring young people's bodies in western PE and, in turn, subjecting such measures to normative evaluations (Vertinsky, 2002). It is imperative to consider, then, how the measuring technologies folded into devices such

as the Wii allow for the body to be deconstructed, analysed and potentially controlled in increasingly sophisticated ways.

Indeed, the Wii is able to identify the vulnerabilities associated with elements of the individual body; in effect, it enables a fragmentary anatomo-politics. In a section of 'Iwata Asks' tellingly labelled 'The Importance of Being Aware of One's Body', Nintendo's senior managing director, Shigeru Miyamoto, surprisingly contends that Wii Fit is not a health promotion tool *per se*. Rather, Wii Fit is a game that facilitates corporeal discoveries: 'I don't think Wii Fit's purpose is to make you fit,' he says, perhaps creating confusion around the game's title, 'What it's actually aiming to do is make you aware of your body' (Us.wii, 2008, volume 1, part 5).

In a video promoting the Wii Fit, a Nintendo spokesperson undergoes a progression of corporeal measurements that demonstrates this device's capacity to construct and relay carnal information that otherwise is hidden from the subject. This process begins with the conjoining of flesh and technology, and is propelled by the Wii's ability to 'see' isolated elements of the body. The text produced by the Wii that appears on the Nintendo worker's video screen reads as follows:

Now please stand on me in a natural way.

Next, relax and release the tension in your shoulders.

And if you put down the Wii Remote, you'll be even lighter!

(Measuring ... Finished!) ...

This is how your center of gravity looks when the shifts are shown on a graph.

And when the shift data is averaged, the graph then looks like this.

Your center of gravity leaned too far right. Do you maintain good daily posture? (Nintendo E3, 2007; also see Ms.Nintendo-Europe, 2007 for video).

As Miyamoto had imagined, this interaction elicits corporeal discoveries. Specifically, it involves the codification and analysis of isolated and at-risk corporeal elements, rendering the Nintendo spokesperson what Deleuze (1995) calls a fragmented 'dividual'. As noted, the device begins with surveillance through a tactile connection: the Balance Board 'watches' for minute fluctuations in movements of the foot. Data gleaned from the surface of the body is translated quickly into a series of passwords (i.e. graphical data) that unlock knowledge of other somatic components hidden from plain view (i.e. centre of gravity and weight distribution). Next, this bodily knowledge is politicized, becoming risk knowledge when contrasted with a pre-established norm ('Your center of gravity leaned *too far* right', emphasis added). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Wii transcends a mere statistical diagnosis.

Measures of the body are linked to a specific embodied behaviour; the user's flawed daily posture is the underlying conduct rendering him at-risk.

This final step is indeed most significant. By encouraging the user to correct his posture, the Wii transitions from a diagnostic analysis (based on measures such as BMI) to a basic prescription for the amelioration of health and eradication of risk tendencies. Technologies have long been central to the conduct of conduct in that they link knowledge of the subject to remotely located human experts. With the Wii, expert health knowledge is folded into the device, allowing for the Wii to express some degree of autonomy in providing immediate (even if rather basic) health recommendations. In essence, experts remain central to governmental control, yet expertise becomes automated, having been embedded in the Wii during production. As described above, Latour professes the importance of recognizing the agency of non-humans. With consumption of the Wii – consumption that, as noted, invokes an economy of risk – non-human agency manifests through a novel articulation: the Wii functions actively and autonomously as a quasi-object risk expert.

CONCLUSION: DOCILITY IN THE NAME OF SELF-EXPRESSION

Of course, deploying expertise in this way requires the attention and concern of engaged human subjects; as Latour suggests, the agency of technologies is realized only through their symbiotic relationship with people. The Wii may be autonomous in the sense that it does not confer with human experts before addressing those at-risk, but it is dependent simultaneously upon active humans in that it requires their continual participation. This raises the important issue of human agency in consumption of active video games. This article has argued that the Wii potentially induces control over corporeality, yet there are no doubt a range of possible experiences that one can have with this technology. The extent to which consumers engage in Wii activities for the purposes of leisure or play should not be underestimated. Kline et al. remind us that play is a cultural form valued over time 'as an energy release and a way of teaching skills, and for its role in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development' (2003: 243). Alternatively, Wii users may call upon consumption strategies designed to resist the Wii's disciplinary or responsibility-promoting features or, since not all Wii games are active in nature, they may simply ignore these features altogether. Furthermore, some Wii consumers may utilize this technology to foster interactivity within real (e.g. familial) or virtual (e.g. online) communities.

Future studies would provide valuable insights by exploring these issues, and by investigating how certain consumption strategies are tied to specific contextual circumstances. This includes research that contrasts public (e.g. in PE) and private uses of the Wii, as well as studies that evaluate consumption,

agency and the politics of embodiment in divergent social, political and economic climates. However, this research on strategic consumption should not obfuscate the ability for new technologies to serve as governmental devices. That is to say, the traditional view that video games are entertainment technologies should not disguise how these devices can serve to control human activity. Lyon (2006) notes how empirical research on surveillant control has produced surprising insights into the ideal conditions for panoptic modes of watching. Rhodes's (2004) ethnographic research in penitentiaries – the archetypal panoptic site – revealed how some inmates invited the gaze of prison guards (e.g. through self-mutilation), thus disrupting the fundamental power dynamic of the panopticon's 'watcher/watched' binary. Conversely, the seemingly least panoptic forms of surveillance – those where the subject of the gaze willingly partakes in surveillance (e.g. media consumption) – may be idyllic for creating docile subjects. This stems from the fact that under such conditions 'docility is achieved in the name of freely chosen self-expression' (Lyon, 2006: 6; cf. Andrejevic, 2004). As commodities instilled with interactive features that build individualized consumer experiences, active video games in fact may mobilize ideologies of self-expression while contributing to the development of indistinguishable, interchangeable and 'desirable' citizens.

In summary, active video games are commonly referred to as such for their ability to activate the human body. In bringing together the analytics of key social theorists, this article has argued that 'active video games' is indeed a most fitting designation: the Wii is active in that it is endowed with the ability to shift the meanings associated with video game consumption, invoking and fortifying governmental and post-disciplinary forms of control. In addition, the Wii can operate as an autonomous quasi-object expert, one which can unlock knowledge of the body to assess and alleviate personal risks. Given these sophisticated features, researchers should continue to explore the social, political and economic impacts of active technologies. Other Nintendo products such as 'Brain Age' seemingly trade on the contemporary salience of risk awareness (Snider, 2006), and companies such as Microsoft are fashioning new video game technologies to intervene in risk communities (Crouse, 2006). These devices suggest that the Wii might not serve as an isolated case, but in fact could signal new trends towards the use of active video games for the conduct of conduct.

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Note

- 1 Wii and Wii Fit are trademarks of Nintendo. The website material contained in the references to Getupandplay (2008), Ms.Nintendo-Europe (2007), Nintendo, (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Nintendo E3 (2007) and Us.wii (2008) are the copyright material of Nintendo.

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