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Proposal of paper for **TRACK 03** “DIGITAL GAME PLAY AS SOCIOTECHNICAL PRACTICE”

The songlines of media harm

by Nana Benjaminsen & Estrid Sørensen

Public debates of the risks for children of playing violent computer games are by game scholars most often analysed as ‘moral regulation’ (e.g. Drotner 1999; Otto 2007). There is no doubt that such debates contribute to forming the possible ways to think of and deal with violent computer games in contemporary society. However, such discursive approaches tend to produce the similar results concerning moral regulation regardless of the ‘risky object’.

By approaching risks as ‘songlines’ Sheila Jasanoff (2003) points to the cultural variety of objects’ existences, and thus of the risk they constitute. ‘Songlines’ of risk are deeply embodied cultural values and beliefs on the basis of which objects are articulated. Depending on the specific character of these culturally and historically variable ‘songlines’ in relation to which a certain object is articulated, the specific risk of this object comes into being. According to Jasanoff, assessing risk of violent computer games is thus necessarily a social and political exercise.

With the notion of ‘songlines’ the paper analyses the press debates on violent computer games following a school shooting in 2006. Discussions of the risk of harm to children caused by violent computer games are as old as the games themselves. Such debates indeed seem to follow the same ‘melody’ whenever they reoccur. Focusing on the ‘risky object’ the paper follows the ‘songlines’ of violent computer games through the German press coverage over six months following the 2006 school shooting in the town Emsdetten.

The analysis shows how violent computer games were ‘sung’ as ‘sports games’, as ‘objects of politics’ and as ‘technical and civic objects’. The different ways of ‘singing’ violent computer games were not due to different interpretations of such games by the press. Rather, the analysis shows that the violent computer games was material semioticly enacted (Mol 2002) by being entangled in different socio-material practices already established with their own routinised ‘songlines’. Only socio-material practices that were in ‘harmony’ with the ‘songlines’ of the press could be articulated here. Much more than a matter of cultural values and beliefs the violent computer games enacted through the German press coverage were results of the coming together of very specific socio-

material arrangements. The violent computer games that came into being through the German press depended on a) the point in times of the debate they are articulated and on b) the material semiotic practices with whom they become entangled in the press coverage. The paper thus demonstrates the material semiotic, multiple and variable character of the risk of violent computer games.

References:

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Proposal of paper for **TRACK 15** - *The Materiality of Learning: towards post-humanist learning theory*

Estrid Sørensen

The past decades' debates on location of agency have not only been of importance to STS but also to learning theory. Scholars of situated learning and related approaches such as Hutchins, Lave, Pea, Suchman and Wenger have been ground-breaking in proposing a way away from theorizing learning as unfolding in the individual mind (or brain), to understanding learning as a social endeavour. While these learning theories have emphasised the social situation in the discussion of the location of agency, STS scholars – especially those applying Actor-Network Theory (and after) – have pointed to socio-material assemblages to investigate hybrid agency.

Approaches focusing on the socially situated character of agency have succeeded very well in presenting new and exciting theories of learning. ANT scholars, on the other hand, have only recently begun to study learning, and thus discussions on learning theory that thoroughly include ANT (and after) informed theoretical vocabulary concerning socio-materially hybridity are still rare.

The paper basically asks the question: how does a learning theory look that approaches learning as socio-materially hybrid? To answer this question we need to think about learning as spatially distributed across humans and nonhumans. With inspiration from Law & Mol's spatial vocabulary, I argue that we need not only abstract from sets of modern ordering categories such as human-nonhuman, knowledge-belief, culture-nature to inquire the hybrid identity of entities thus involved

in learning. Rather, we should not focus on entities at all, but start inquiring the spatial pattern the learning practice in question takes. This allows us to characterise learning in terms of the spatial socio-material pattern this practice takes, and following from this we can identify different forms of learning that produce different knowledges and different human presences. Based on my recent book (Sørensen 2009), I present my (after) ANT inspired re-thinking of situated learning theory through empirical examples from my research into learning materials in primary school.

Proposal of paper for **TRACK 23** - CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Creativity in everyday use of a risky technology: the case of violent computer games

Estrid Sørensen

The paper is founded on a view on creativity as a hybrid phenomenon distributed across socio-material relations. This post-humanist approach allows us to inquire empirically how, where and when creativity comes into being as related to an individual human, as embedded in a cultural practice, as instantiated by materials, or other. Such an empirical investigation is presented in the paper.

Focus is on creativity involved in the implementation and use of violent computer games in children's everyday practices. Such use is considered to entail a certain risk to the individual child. In most of the world computer games are equipped with a label indicating the age a child should (or must) have in order to purchase the game. This assessment is based on expertise of which age groups may be harmed by playing the game in question.

The labels on violent computer games provide on the one hand unambiguous clarity: if a person is younger than the age printed on the label then the game is not suitable for that person. However, in terms of practice, the label is far from unambiguous. 'Age group' is an extremely rough category ranging from on the one hand very mature children with much game experience and competence in understanding games to on the other hand children who have never been in contact with violent computer games and who are thus more likely be overwhelmed and harmed by them. For this reason the number on the label is usually read not as a simple reference to the number of years a person has lived since birth, but as a matter of maturity in the specific area of computer game

use. Furthermore, younger children play with older ones and the former thereby often come in contact with games not intended for them. Children are generally aware that they are defined as being at risk when playing violent computer games. Parents also have this awareness and being responsible for the child most parents relate to this risk in one way or the other. Even though the label is only intended to refer to the individual child player and her psyche, the risk comes to concern a complexity of cultural practices.

For these and other reasons violent computer games require of the practices in which they are used that they ways to deal with the risk that accompany the games. Since the label does not provide any standard way to deal with risk, a certain amount of creativity is needed of these practices in order for the technology to be implemented. More than being a set of complicated relations between children, parents and violent computer games the implementation of this technology involves the young users' (sometimes older) peers just as they involve cultures and habits for how to deal with the kind of media in question and the routines and rituals of the everyday practices become part of.

Based on interviews with five German families the paper presents the ways in which the risk to children of violent computer games is dealt with and translated when implementing violent computer games in everyday practices. Particularly, the paper asks where, when and how creativity is involved in this process, and to whom this creativity is granted.