

# Comparison of the representations of political power in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* and *Witcher III*

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## Keywords

content analysis, center-peripheries relation, political power, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, *Witcher III*.

## ABSTRACT

My presentation will focus on the analysis of representations of political power in two games: *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. The main theoretical frame will be Ulf Hannerz's theory of cultural creolization. Stemming from Immanuel Wallerstein's World-Systems theory it divides world into centers and peripheries, but unlike the Wallerstein's theory it focuses on cultural and not economical relationships between them. Hannerz's theory argues that centers are holding not only economical, but also symbolic power by providing the meanings and symbols that can later be reconfigured and creolized through adding new meanings by the peripheries. The center-periphery relation is a power relation, so media created by entities involved in this relation will reflect that. Also games will use their rhetoric power to empower or subvert this relation.

In order to define the nature of actors interacting in this model, I use the notion of cultural production fields created by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu defines field as an area of social relations facilitating its own specific set of rules and principles of functioning within it.

What constitutes the video games' field is a unique set of properties that video games share as a medium: their interactivity combined with narrativity that results in distinctive ways of reception and production. Developers, publishers and audiences interact with each other in the video games' field. This field has its own centers and peripheries. The relation between them is hegemonic: it provides security for developers hailing from peripheries by presenting guidelines and patterns of how proper medium shall be constructed to be comprehensible to broader audience, hence maximizing the chance of commercial success. Poland is not a complete periphery, and especially in area of game industry it holds a strong position on the global markets. This potentially creates a situation in which Polish game developers have enough symbolic power to partially overcome the hegemony, to make some of elements of the game visibly theirs (that is: not steaming from center's patterns).

Because of that, comparing games stemming from centers to those from semiperipheries and analyzing subtle differences between the way they portray political power is crucial to understanding the shifts in the relations of power within computer games' field.

Extended Abstract Presented at DiGRA 2017

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I have chosen *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* because both games are mainstream AAA productions. They both represent the RPG genre and are settled in fantasy setting. What differentiates them is the position in the cultural production field held by institutions that have created them. One of them stems from the center of game production field, and the other - from semiperiphery. This predisposes them to being a subject of this kind of analysis.

Because of a preliminary and exploratory nature of this study, the main method used will be a computer aided content analysis of cut-scenes from both games, focused on moments in which political power is represented. Game play analysis of both titles based on the think-aloud protocol study model will be used as an auxiliary method. The aforementioned cut-scenes from both games will be recorded, then coded and analyzed in CAQDAs using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Based on the data gathered in this process the mid-range theory regarding the role of representations of political power in the center-periphery relations in computer games' field will be formulated. That will serve as base for more representative quantitative study that will be conducted at a later time.

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