

# Protecting the Youth by Controlling the Ludic Indexing Practices in 1980s West Germany

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## INTRODUCTION

In autumn 1983, just in time for Christmas shopping, home computers were introduced as a mass product to the West German market.<sup>1</sup> Digital gaming moved from arcades into the homes of its players, continuing the trend set by gaming consoles in the late 1970s. Home computers enabled users to play games developed by a diverse set of companies, copy code from magazines or other users, or program their own games. Gaming thus evaded the constraints of its previous publicity and often even eluded parental supervision. This situation prompted the Federal Review Board for Publications Harmful to Minors (BPjS)<sup>2</sup> to *index* some computer games, i.e. to prohibit them from being sold, advertised, or otherwise made available to minors.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Cf. Eckert, Roland et al.: *Auf digitalen Pfaden. Die Kulturen von Hackern, Programmierern, Crackern und Spielern, Opladen*: Westdeutscher Verlag 1991, pp. 155-156.

2 Abbreviation: Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften.

3 To index (German: “indizieren”) is the action of placing a publication on the ‘Index’, i.e. the List of Publications Harmful to Minors (LjS: Liste der jugendgefährdenden Schriften). Publications on the Index are subject to the mentioned prohibitions.

This paper conducts a Foucauldian critical genealogy of game indexing in the 1980s.<sup>4,5</sup> To this end, ten BPjS indexing documents are analyzed and their central arguments contextualized in discourses of media effects research and social ethics. This analysis follows the central thesis that stereotypical imaginations of a gaming youth constituted the basis for institutionalized control of games in the 1980s. The first section is a brief overview of game indexing and its method of operation in the 1980s. The second section discusses its constitutional context. The third section traces references in ten exemplary indexing documents to grasp the BPjS's process of knowledge generation. In the final chapter, Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen's concept of "technologies of the imagination" will aid in understanding how reactionary morality in youth protection discourses led to the indexing (prohibition) of computer games by the BPjS and other actors who were influenced by their imagination, rather than by their observation of children and youths at play.<sup>6</sup>

The BPjS has been characterized as a censorship institution by many critics, as discussed below. While my analysis is a critical one, I prefer the term *control* over *censorship* to describe indexing. As Frederick Schauer observes, censorship is a problematic term for external influences on communication, because on a descriptive level, it cannot be distinguished from other forms of discourse control. Claiming censorship denotes that control is exercised by undesired actors in contrast to control by desired actors (e.g., librarians choosing literature for a library), which is considered professional selection.<sup>7</sup> My aim is not to denounce the BPjS, but to understand the historical conditions which led to indexing decisions that were incomprehensible to critics of the time and today.

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4 This article is a brief account of the key findings of my master's thesis.

5 Michel Foucault's discourse and governmentality theories provide the theoretical background for the document and context analysis used here. Cf. Foucault, Michel: "The Order of Discourse", In: Young, Robert J. C. (ed.), *Untying the text. A post-structuralist reader*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981, pp. 48-78; Foucault, Michel: *Security, territory, population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, New York, NY: Picador 2009.

6 Sneath, David/Holbraad, Martin/Pedersen, Morten Axel: "Technologies of the Imagination: An Introduction", In: *Ethnos* 74 (2009), pp. 5-30.

7 Cf. Schauer, Frederick: "The Ontology of Censorship", In: Post, Robert C. (ed.), *Censorship and silencing. Practices of cultural regulation*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications 1998, pp. 147-168.

## INDEXING GAMES IN THE 1980S

In 1984, the BPjS began to index action games for home computers, starting with the fighter jet game RIVER RAID.<sup>8</sup> The BPjS claimed that the game trained its players in aggressive behavior and exposed them to a strict regimen of order and obedience. Young players were deemed uninterested in the difference between reality and fiction, hence unable to reflect that they were ‘just playing,’ and consequently they were easily affected by the game.<sup>9</sup> The ruling against RIVER RAID paved the way for 133 indexings of computer games in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> How could these decisions come to be? Why were the pixelated games of the 1980s considered means of militarization, brutalization, and dehumanization, while their graphic representation of violence seems trivial and harmless from today’s perspective?

Comparing a sample of ten BPjS decisions which indexed action computer games reveals several paragraphs, sentences, and phrases that are featured identically or similarly in all or most of the documents.<sup>11</sup> Apart from phrases necessary for normative administrative texts, most of these segments contain the central arguments of the indexing decision. In these passages, game and gamer are ambiguously depicted as equal partners as well as master and subject, respectively. A translated excerpt from the BPjS document on BEACH HEAD exemplifies this:

“The game device acts as a game partner, both parts—player and game device—react to each other [...]. The player’s reactions keep the game going, his creative possibilities are limited to avoiding, shooting, and destroying. The course of the game does not allow any other

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8 RIVER RAID (Carol Shaw, 1982: Activision).

9 Cf. Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften: 454/84, December 13, 1984.

10 Cf. Beierwaltes, Andreas/Neumann-Braun, Klaus: “Computerspiele und Indizierungspraxis. Zu Mediengewalt und Doppelmoral in der Gesellschaft”, In: *medienpraktisch* 16 (1992), pp. 20-24, here pp. 21-22.

11 Analyzed BPjS documents and respective games: BPjS: 454/84 on River Raid (Carol Shaw, 1982: Activision); BPjS: 341/85 on Beach Head (Bruce Carver, 1983: Access Software); BPjS: 106/86 on Blue Max (Peter Adams, 1983: Synapse Software); BPjS 334/86 on Theatre Europe (Personal Software Services, 1985: Personal Software Services); BPjS: 7/87 on Protector II (Ken Rose, 1983: Synapse Software); BPjS: 13/87 on G.I. Joe (Epyx, 1985: Epyx); BPjS: 307/87 on S.D.I. (Master Designer Software, 1986: Cinemaware); BPjS: 466/87 on Shockway Rider (Carter Follis Software Associates, 1987: Faster Than Light); BPjS: 534/87 on Highlander (Canvas, 1986: Ocean Software); BPjS: 629/87 on Renegade (Technos Japan, 1986: Taito).

decisions. [...] Furthermore, the game forces the player into an automated ‘command and obedience relationship’ in which obedient behavior is expected without question.”<sup>12</sup>

The paradoxical claim of both equivalence and hierarchy between game and player is due to the two main arguments for the indexing. For the BPjS, BEACH HEAD and the other nine games are harmful to minors because they make players passive, therefore stunting their development of self-determination. At the same time, the BPjS assumes an activating effect that induces aggressive behavior.

The BPjS assumes that playing action games also leads to increased aggression outside of the game context. This is based on the following related assumptions: firstly, the games exert performance pressure on the players leading to “physical tension, anger, aggressiveness, mental slowness, concentration difficulties, headaches, and other problems;”<sup>13</sup> secondly, this pressure is intensified through the authoritative nature of the game, which exclusively orders aggressive action and offers no alternative solutions; thirdly, this leads to the fact that “aggression reduction can [...] only take place outside of the game.”<sup>14</sup> The BPjS sees a habituation of aggressive behavior as a result of these three effects. This cannot be ameliorated by reflecting on it being ‘only a game’, since children and youths are “not so much interested in the difference between game and reality.”<sup>15</sup> Children and adolescents cannot distinguish game spaces from their material environment, according to the BPjS.<sup>16</sup>

This argument follows an assessment on RIVER RAID by psychologist Helmut Kampe, which is part of the file on the game.<sup>17</sup> Kampe attempted a hermeneutic study of RIVER RAID referenced and, in many cases, even copied in the action computer game indexings to come. The recurring passages cited above are all taken verbatim or in essence from Kampe. Two of the passages that recur in most indexings in verbatim contain references to a research project at the University of

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12 BPjS: 341/85, p. 4. This and all other excerpts from the BPjS documents are my translation.

13 Ibid., p. 5. Similar in BPjS: 106/86, p. 6; 334/86, p. 5; 7/87, p. 4; 13/87, p. 4; 307/87, p. 5.

14 BPjS: 341/85, p. 5; 106/86, p. 6; 7/87, p. 4; 13/87, p. 5; 307/87, p. 5.

15 BPjS: 341/85, p. 5; 106/86, p. 6; 7/87, p. 4; 13/87, p. 4; 466/87, p. 4; 534/87, p. 4; 629/87, p. 6.

16 Although the cited passages are not included in all analyzed BPjS documents, as can be seen by the mentioned references, the overall argumentative structure is the same throughout.

17 BPjS: 454/84.

Applied Sciences in Cologne, discussed in more detail below.<sup>18</sup> Kampe asserts that the findings of this research project support his claims about the effects of computer games.<sup>19</sup>

## NEGOTIATING FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Before these references are analyzed further, a brief account of critical voices against the BPjS and its relationship to other institutions of power is necessary. This is to provide contextualization and an account of the BPjS's standing in the German state and society.

As one of the few institutions in Germany with the authority to limit free speech, the BPjS has been under critical scrutiny since its foundation in 1953, frequent accusations of censorship against the BPjS being a recurring theme.<sup>20</sup> The first sentence of the fifth article of the German Constitution—"Censorship does not take place"—lends the powerful claim of unconstitutionality to these accusations.<sup>21</sup> However, the Constitution also offers an equally powerful refutation: The imperative of "Censorship does not take place" has exceptions, one of them being youth protection.<sup>22</sup>

Some critics accept youth protection as a necessary limit of free speech but claim malpractice by the BPjS. In a pamphlet to the German Parliament, K. Volter accuses the BPjS of autocratic oppression of different world views and of effectively censoring publications not only for minors, but for the whole German public.<sup>23, 24</sup> Similar criticism originated from the Börsenverein des Deutschen

18 Fritz, Jürgen/Dorst, Brigitte/Metzner, Joachim: "Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht" Part I-IX, In: *Spielmittel* 2-5 (1983) and 1-5 (1984).

19 BPjS: 454/84, pp. 15, 17.

20 Cf. Volter, K.: Denkschrift. *Unsichtbare Zensur und geistige Freiheit*, Stuttgart: Freyja 1959; Bauer, Fritz: "Grundgesetz und Schmutz- und Schundgesetz", In: *Juristenzeitung* 20 (1965), pp. 41-47; Otto, Ulla: *Die literarische Zensur als Problem der Soziologie der Politik*, Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag 1968; Barsch, Achim: *Jugendmedienschutz und Literatur* Universität Siegen 1988; Kentler, Helmut: "Jugendschutz als Zensur. Zur Spruchpraxis der Bundesprüfstelle", In: *vorgänge* 27 (1988), pp. 74-87.

21 "Eine Zensur findet nicht statt." Art. 5 (1) GG.

22 Art. 5 (2) GG.

23 K. Volter's first name is not mentioned in full in their publications.

24 Cf. K. Volter: *Denkschrift*.

Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association). The Börsenverein had a seat in the BPjS but stepped down in 1982 to protest the indexing of an edition of the erotic novel *Josephine Mutzenbacher*.<sup>25, 26</sup>

The publishers' and Volter's use of the term censorship is similar to that of Silke Buschmann's.<sup>27</sup> Books are censored, she writes, not because of detrimental effects but because they contradict the dogma of a ruling social organism. Censorship takes place when this organism has passed its prime and tries to save its preferred societal order.<sup>28</sup> In this understanding, the accusation of censorship against the BPjS contains two assertions: Firstly, it implies that there is a prevailing dogma represented by the BPjS, and secondly, that the accuser's own moral conception is the newer and superior one. With the combination of the accusation of censorship and the assertion of one's own moral primacy, a paradoxical tension arises between the critique of, and claim to, hegemony. In most academic texts on the subject, the accusations of censorship against the BPjS lack this claim. The review board is seen as a means of oppression, which uses youth protection as a pretext to censor literature (and in a few cases also other media).<sup>29</sup>

Despite broad scrutiny, the BPjS's practice has remained virtually untouched. The board has been able to maintain a high level of continuity, illustrated by the fact that between 1954 and 2016, the BPjS only had four different chairpersons. An explanation for this resistance to change lies within the tension between a subjective and an objective concept of liberty.<sup>30</sup> Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde

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25 The BPjS had twelve seats in normal and three in speedy proceedings, given to governmental, religious and civil representatives. Critics viewed the appointment process as biased, cf. e.g. A. Barsch: *Jugendmedienschutz und Literatur*, p. 19.

26 Cf. Heker, Harald: "BPS: Rückkehr der Verleger?", In: *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel* from 21.07.1992, pp. 6-8.

27 Cf. Buschmann, Silke: *Literarische Zensur in der BRD nach 1945*, pp. 22-23.

28 Ibid.

29 Cf. U. Otto: *Die literarische Zensur als Problem der Soziologie der Politik*; Ferchl, Irene: "Zensurinstitutionen und Zensurinitiativen", In: Kienzle, Michael/Mende, Dirk (eds.), *Zensur in der BRD. Fakten und Analysen*, München, Wien: Hanser 1980; Kienzle, Michael: "Logophobie. Zensur und Selbstzensur in der BRD", In: M. Kienzle/D. Mende (eds.), *Zensur in der BRD* (1980), pp. 15-46; H. Kentler: "Jugendschutz als Zensur.", pp. 74-87; S. Buschmann: *Literarische Zensur in der BRD nach 1945*, p. 85.

30 The BPjS also has a high level of legal immunity through the GjS. This legal immunity can be attributed to the same discursive conditions as the immunity to criticism explained here.

discusses this tension as a fundamental problem of the interpretation of constitutional rights. In the subjective conception, liberty is performed and defined by the individual. The state only acts as a negotiating intermediary, which leads to arbitrariness and inequality, Böckenförde cautions. Objective liberty, by contrast, can provide equality but requires a determination of universal values, which, in turn, entails hegemony. Böckenförde prefers a third concept of liberty that both allows for individual interpretations of liberty and is guided by collective values.<sup>31</sup> In the German Constitution, freedom of speech is a negotiated liberty: Censoring a publication is prohibited, as long as it respects certain core values—including youth protection.

Youth, thus, is a value that needs to be determined. When the BPjS was founded, Christian social ethics provided a moral compass to a post-Nazi country in need of a state ethos. Consequently, the Catholic church had considerable influence over legislature and value-building processes of the Bonn Republic.<sup>32</sup> The BPjS is a case in point: The Volkswartbund (Warden of the People Association), an organization of the archbishopric of Cologne, initiated its formation.<sup>33</sup> The first chairman of the BPjS, Robert Schilling, continued to work closely with the Volkswartbund.<sup>34</sup> Schilling pursued a restoration of a Christian West,<sup>35</sup> and declared the protection of the traditional, heteronormative family model as the main goal of youth protection.<sup>36</sup>

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31 Böckenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang: *Recht, Staat, Freiheit. Studien zur Rechtsphilosophie, Staatstheorie und Verfassungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1992, pp. 44-47.

32 Cf. Anzenbacher, Arno: *Christliche Sozialethik. Einführung und Prinzipien*, Paderborn: Schöningh 1998, p. 150; Humberg, Michael: *Vom Erwachsenenverbot zur Jugendfreigabe. Die Filmbewertungen der FSK als Gradmesser des kulturellen Wertewandels*, Münster: Telos 2013, p. 120; Mölich, Georg: “Christliches Abendland am Rhein. Ein politisches Denkmodell der früheren Bonner Republik”, In: Cepl-Kaufmann, Gertrude/et al. (eds.), *Die Bonner Republik 1945-1963 – Die Gründungsphase und die Adenauer-Ära. Geschichte – Forschung – Diskurs*: transcript 2018, pp. 85-95, here p. 85.

33 Cf. Schilling, Robert: *Schund – und Schmutzgesetz. Handbuch und Kommentar zum Gesetz über die Verbreitung jugendgefährdender Schriften vom 9. Juni 1953*, Darmstadt: Stoyscheff 1953, p. 46.

34 Cf. Schilling, Robert: *Zwei Jahre Bundesprüfstelle*, Köln: Volkswartbund 1956, p. 9; I. Ferchl: *Zensurinstitutionen und Zensurinitiativen*, pp. 214-215.

35 Cf. R. Schilling: *Schund- und Schmutzgesetz*, p. 8.

36 Cf. R. Schilling: *Zwei Jahre Bundesprüfstelle*, p. 3.

The BPjS's knowledge generation followed this naturalized concept of youth. A free subject, in this understanding, can only develop if childhood and adolescence are spent in an environment free of harm and full of virtue. This presupposes an objective value of youth, which, in effect, was defined *ex negativo* by the indexing practice of the BPjS. Defining and guaranteeing the core value of 'youth' within the negotiation of liberty, the BPjS was immune to more subjective claims of freedom of speech.

Until the 1970s, the BPjS based most of their indexing on claims of sexual ethics violations. In the 1980s, however, depictions of violence constituted the majority of indexed media.<sup>37</sup> Although Christian social ethics lost significance as a state ethos, the BPjS still operated with 'objective' terminology: a publication could still only be indexed when its harmful effect was considered definite.

## PROVING TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

Without an objective set of values, other epistemes had to fill the void in BPjS's knowledge generation left by Christian social ethics. In the analyzed indexings, this void is filled with an idealized, humanist understanding of a 'natural' youth: play is only considered beneficial when it is taking place without technology, hence digital games militarize, dehumanize, and rationalize children and youths.

A further look into the references in Kampe's assessment illustrates how this technological determinism made its way into the very core of the BPjS's indexing practice. Kampe bases his claims of the psychosomatic and aggression-inducing effects of digital games on a research project led by media education scholar Jürgen Fritz.<sup>38</sup> The findings of this project were published in the family magazine *Spielmittel* (Devices of Play), as a series of nine articles titled "Video Games – Controllable Worlds on a Wire."<sup>39</sup> Fritz and colleagues set out to explore the influence of video games on socialization. With its nine articles and a diverse

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37 Cf. Hajok, Daniel/Hildebrandt, Daniel: "Jugendgefährdung im Wandel der Zeit. Veränderungen und Konstanten in der BPjM – Spruchpraxis zu Darstellungen von Sexualität und Gewalt", In: *BPjM Aktuell* (2015), pp. 3-17, here p. 4.

38 Cf. BPjS: 454/84, pp 15, 17.

39 J. Fritz/B. Dorst/J. Metzner: *Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht Part I-IX*.

methodology, the study is too comprehensive to be fully described and analyzed in this paper.<sup>40</sup> I will only briefly present some key aspects.

The premise of the study, that any preconceptions of computer games are discarded in the interest of science,<sup>41</sup> must be questioned in view of numerous technologically deterministic interpretations of data in the rest of the study. The preface introduces computers as invaders of the emotion-based world of humans. Contact with computers, in Fritz's view, leads to the elimination of the irrational, creative, and sensible and puts the human in a purely information-consuming position without the chance to think critically. Computer games fit into this scenario as both overpowering overlords that sedate young players into a state of inactivity and as instigators of feelings of omnipotence.<sup>42</sup>

In the following eight articles of the *Spielmittel* series, the topos of computers as invaders of the human world recurs as the central interpretation of the study's data, which was collected in an experiment with school and university students. The participants had two hours to play as many games as they liked from a collection of about 300 games. Before and after the session as well as after the individual games, the participants were surveyed on their feelings and well-being. A group discussion was conducted to reflect experiences during play, and photographs of the players were taken to capture their expressions.<sup>43</sup>

The surveys found significant changes in the participants' emotional state after playing. Almost all variables—positive general mood, vitality, activity, stress, positive social emotionality, self-confidence, and interest—settled at average values after two hours of play. Fritz interprets this as a de-emotionalizing effect of digital games. The data suggest a stronger de-emotionalization in older adolescents and young adults than in children. Older participants, Fritz concludes, are more competitive and therefore more likely to get caught up in the game's pressure to perform. The more advanced reflectiveness of older players allows them to quickly see through the game's fantastic avatars and thus understand the game mechanics faster but is nevertheless often insufficient to escape the game's draw to play to the point of emotional exhaustion. Intensive play, thus, wears older

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40 Study design and methodology elaborated in Fritz, Jürgen: "Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht Teil I. Erläuterung und Begründung des Forschungsprojekts", In: *Spielmittel* (1983), pp. 2-7, here pp. 6-7.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2.

42 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 3.

43 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

adolescents and young adults out emotionally to a higher degree than their younger peers.<sup>44</sup>

Fritz's claim of a general fatiguing effect of computer games does not consider the unusual setting in which they were played. Participants found themselves in a room with hundreds of games, were faced with the objective to play as many of them as possible and had to identify favorites to cater a cut-throat competition between the games.<sup>45</sup> Fatigue after two hours of exposition can hardly be attributed to playing games alone. A moment of reflection, where Fritz states that the findings should only be seen as indicators for temporary effects of individual games, is negated by the posit that longer play creates "an indifferent phenomenal world, a desert of consciousness, an emotional swamp without a clear emotional tendency and expression."<sup>46</sup>

Three iterations of techno-deterministic tendency have now been addressed: Firstly, the experiment design results in a stressful gaming situation, which, secondly, results in stress and fatigue being the major findings of the subsequent survey, and thirdly, playing games is identified as a mind-numbing stressor due to this data. In the description of the group discussion following the gaming session, this techno-deterministic narrative is even more prominent. Participants reporting that they are still shivering, cannot concentrate anymore, feel a bit stupid, and don't remember what they played is interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship between games and long-lasting effects such as headaches, aching eyes, tremors, loss of memory, and concentration disorders.<sup>47</sup> Most participants judged the games as unrealistic and thus expressed a reflective distance to what they depicted. Still, their reports of indifference to shooting down objects in the game are taken as evidence for a perception of ludic action as actual, cold-blooded murder.<sup>48</sup>

Only negative remarks about video games are acknowledged as critical thinking and are considered a result of the pedagogical approach of the group discussion. Brigitte Dorst's account of the group discussion in the fifth part of the

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44 Cf. Fritz, Jürgen: "Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht Teil III. Software – Wirkungen, systematische Vergleiche", In: *Spielmittel* (1983), pp. 30-37 and 69-75, here pp. 32-35 and 72-73.

45 Cf. Fritz, Jürgen: "Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht Teil IV. Software – Systematische Vergleiche", In: *Spielmittel* (1983), pp. 24-32 and 49-62, here 60.

46 Ibid., 62, my translation.

47 Cf. Dorst, Brigitte: "Videospiele – Regelbare Welten am Draht Teil V. Erlebnisdimensionen von Jugendlichen beim Videospiele!", In: *Spielmittel* (1984), pp. 24-36, here p. 26.

48 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

*Spielmittel* series illustrates this bias. For example, she reproduces a participant's statement that "war games benefit from the fact that they are abstract" because they thus "appear less harmful."<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the implicit acknowledgement of the gruesome reality of war and of the fictionality of games in this statement, Dorst equates the remark with a game-induced "functional way of thinking" which treats events, living beings, and things alike as "interchangeable objects."<sup>50</sup> While Dorst does not recognize a critical distance to games in this instance, she does so when participants report being quickly bored by games. Here, the students are not simply bored, but "see through" the "monotony" of the games.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, Dorst views the group discussion as a pedagogic success encouraging critical self-reflection.<sup>52</sup>

## IMAGINING A PLAYING YOUTH

The technological determinism featured in the *Spielmittel* study was adopted and intensified by Kampe and then again by the BPjS. Step by step, the weak—and problematic—indication of a fatiguing effect from intensive play became the definitive evidence of a computerization of the new generation, a de-emotionalization, and the fall of humanism. The mental health of a whole generation seemed to be at stake.

Why some statements by Fritz and Dorst could attain this intertextual power in seemingly unrelated contexts can be explained if they are seen as part of various discourses around youth media culture. The BPjS did not operate in discursive isolation; the organization was permeable to interpretive practices of other groups like the *Spielmittel* study group. The BPjS acted in contact with discourses of politics and, as has been shown, especially to discourses of social ethics. Its position within the German state and legal structure gave the BPjS power to grant hegemonic interpretative power to these external discourses.

Far removed from the empirical basis of its knowledge, the BPjS decided not based on an observation but an imagination of a playing generation. The refining process of the techno-deterministic narrative between the *Spielmittel* study, Kampe's assessment, and the indexing decision can be grasped as a complex 'technology of the imagination.' This concept was coined by Sneath, Holbraad

49 "Bei Kriegsspielen hilft es, wenn die abstrakt sind, es wirkt dann harmloser." Ibid.

50 Ibid., my translation.

51 Ibid., p. 36, my translation.

52 Cf. *ibid.*

and, Pedersen and is a modification of imagology, as introduced by Benedict Anderson.<sup>53</sup> It adopts the notion that imagination is an effect of certain practices and is the basis of modern communities such as nations.<sup>54</sup> To introduce a more precise tool for analyzing imagination, the three authors introduce the concept of imagination as an effect of particular ‘technologies.’ Technologies, here, is both used in a colloquial sense and to address an abstract, theoretical object.<sup>55</sup> Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen’s concept is used for its precise definition of the relationship between these technologies and imagination: “[T]he distinguishing mark of imaginative effects is that while they are the product of the specific processes we are calling ‘technologies’, they are nevertheless peculiarly underdetermined by them.”<sup>56</sup> This indeterminacy is applicable to discourse and imagination. In this sense, discourses can engender imagination but do not necessarily do so. Yet, some technologies—and, I argue, discourses—“are particularly good at opening up spaces in which the underdetermined outcomes that we call imagination emerge.”<sup>57</sup> The knowledge generation behind 1980s game indexing was a complex set of technologies which did not determine the historical outcome but was the source of the BPjS’s image of playing children and youths.

## CONCLUSION

By providing an overview of the BPjS’s game indexing practice in the 1980s, this paper demonstrates the relationship between the media control institution and the novel practices of digital gaming at home. The brief account of the legal and constitutional basis of the BPjS as well as a report of my analysis of indexing documents provide a better understanding of the BPjS’s close relationship with political, moral, and scientific discourses. As the above section introduced, the complex entanglements of these discourses can be subsumed as technologies of the imagination. The central thesis of this study maintains that an imagination of a youth at play is the basis of the BPjS’s practice.

Further publications should analyze indexing documents in more detail, which are outside the scope of this paper, to further illustrate the knowledge generation underpinning indexing. In my ongoing research, I conduct a similar knowledge

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53 Cf. D. Sneath/M. Holbraad/M. A. Pedersen: *Technologies of the Imagination*.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

archaeology in relation to the control of mechanical, electrical, and digital games in 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany. Was the policing of coin machines, flipper machines, and early console games based on similar imaginations of a playing youth? Which institutions were responsible for the control of the ludic in different political and social contexts? How was their knowledge generated and which discourses had power over or gained power through these institutions? Future research could deploy the methodology of this paper to uncover the indeterminate yet consequential role our cultural imaginations play within different instances of institutionalized media control.

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