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R U S S I A

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The history of video games in Russia goes back to the early 1980s. In the beginning of the computer era, Soviet arcade games, very primitive compared to today's standard, included a large number of slot machines or electromechanical arcade games such as Morskoi Boi (Sea Battle, 1981), Tankodrom (1981), Rally-M (1981), Sniper (1981), and Safari (1982). In Sea Battle, the player had to shell enemy ships, while Rally-M was a racing game, and in Sniper, the player had to shell the target (see http://www.15kop.ru/en/). These games were coin-operated; it was necessary to insert fifteen kopecks into the machine, which gave you about three minutes of play. These kinds of gaming machines were usually installed in urban parks and cinema lobbies, and they were very popular among Soviet children and adults.

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, Soviet military factories produced some seventy different arcade game models like these, but "production of the games ceased with the collapse of communism, and as Nintendo consoles and PCs flooded the former Soviet states, the old arcade games were either destroyed or disappeared into warehouses and basements" (Zaitchik 2007).

From 1984 to 1985, Alexéy Pazhitnov developed the first Russian video game, Tetris, which was based on tetrominoes falling on the screen and disappearing as players filled each row. The game soon became very popular not only in Russia but also abroad. Tetris was not copyrighted at first, allowing it to spread even faster than it would have otherwise.

In 1989, Nikita Skripkin created (for the developer Locis) what was a very opportunistic computer game for the time, Perestroika. Named in honor of the Perestroika movement, the splash screen shows Mikhail Gorbachev against the Kremlin wall. The game comes with a soundtrack and a gramophone recording of the song "Dubinushka" by Feodor Chaliapin (a sort of comparison with the PC computer's sound system, the speakers). The game's objective was to use the keyboard's arrow keys to send a frog "democrat" through the swamp by jumping from lily to lily, while trying not to drown or be eaten by other frogs, which were "bureaucrats." Lil - ies periodically reduced in size, disappearing and reappearing in other places, all at different rates (overall speed increased with each level). On some lilies were blue pills that increased the frog's "welfare" (increasing the score), and when they were eaten, the frog produced a characteristic "yum" sound. Red pills, on the other hand, had a negative effect. At higher levels ("milestones"), different colored computer-controlled opponent

frogs appeared—the "bureaucrats" who would try to catch the player's frog "democrat." The round would end when the lily pad that the frog was sitting on disappeared, the frog jumped into the water, or it "ate" a bureaucrat. The game was a success with consumers.

Also established in 1991, the Russian company Gamos released successful logic-based video game 7 Colors (1991) and Color Lines (1992). Gamos managed to enter the foreign market and beginning in 1999 made the switch to online video games while working with the TV channel TNT. Another company, Nikita (renamed Nikita Online in 2007), was launched in 1991 by Skripkin and Stepan Zotov and produced educational video games including Wunderkind (1995), Happy Birthday (1995), Anatomik (1996), Journey through Europe (1996), Twigger (1996), Magic Dream (1997), Parkan (1997), the arcade game Hunter on the Road (1997), and more. Though Gamos successfully started in the 1990s, when it later tried to enter the online gaming market, it could not withstand the competition, and in 2005 it ceased operations.

In 1993, Buka Entertainment entered the video game market and became not only a distributor of video game consoles from SEGA, Nintendo, and Sony, but also a manufacturer of its own games (since 2010, for the iPhone). Some of Buka's games include Education of Neznaika (1999), Magic Chest (1999), and Magic Game (2012).

The rapid development of the video game industry in Russia, since 1990, contributed to the massive expansion of the Internet in Russia. The early twenty-first century was a turning point for Russia in the intensive development of multiplayer browser video games on social platforms (such as the social network Facebook), including Mafia (2006), Virtual Russia (2007), and Soul (2013), and was also the period when Russia began to develop video games for mobile phones.

It should be noted that almost the entire history of video games in Russia is inextricably linked to video game piracy. Pirated copies of Western and Russian video games (especially in 1990) successfully took away profits from legitimate companies. The fight against video game piracy has been conducted and carried out in Russia through legislation; however, the pirate audiovisual market continues its activity.

Today, social video games are dominant in Russia. The games are created and distributed by companies Mail.ru Group, Crazy Panda, Plarium, and Social Quantum, which control 50% of the Russian market for video games ("Review of the game market in Russia in 2011" 2012, 18).

The Reception of Foreign Imports

By the 1990s, the video game market in Russia was basically a pirate one, with many Western novelty games coming into Russia illegally, and although they probably enjoyed great popularity among the people, it is almost impossible to find exact figures as to the income they brought in. Even today, a significant percentage of the video game market in twenty-first century Russia is imported products (almost all well-known foreign video games, especially hits, can be found in the Russian market), while Russian manufacturers seek to keep up with the domestic market developments. In 2012, the total turnover of the Russian video game market

reached US $1.3 billion, almost one-and-a-half times as much as in 2010. This turnover exceeds the income received from the cinema box office in Russia, which in 2012 was equivalent USD $1.2 billion. Despite all these achievements, the worldwide market share of video games for Russia is low, at only 2.2% ("Game Market in Russia" 2012, 4–6).

The growth in profit of the video game market in the country is largely dependent on increasing the influence of online games (the market share of the online segment increased in 2012 by 64% to USD $0.9 billion). In general, their volume has grown from 2010 to 2012 to 2.4 times what it was before, while the market for offline games dropped by about 12%. ("Game market in Russia" 2012, 4–6).

Significant increases occurred in the spread of video games in Russian social networks, and by the end of 2012, they reached a monthly audience of 52.6 million people. For example, playing video games occupies about one-third of social networks' daily audience (which generally includes 9 million users). The average social network users who play are willing to spend about USD $15 per month to play online games ("Games market in Russia" 2012, 7).

Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) are popular in Russia, in particular because they are free-to-play games (with no mandatory payments, although gamers can purchase additional in-game objects or features). Profit from casual games in 2012 dropped significantly; however, due to the fact that these games are only 1% of the total video game market in Russia, this decline was unobtrusive.

The Russian console game market in 2012 grew by only 2%, mainly due to the Sony PlayStation and PSP. In the area of video games designed for mobile phones and tablets, Android and Apple's iOS are the leading platforms ("Game market in Russia" 2012, 8–10), and due to the fact that the number of users of smartphones and tablets in Russia is growing, this segment of the market will expand.

The Influence of Russian National History on Video Games

During the Soviet era, in the 1970s and 1980s, the primitive nature of the games produced did not allow historical themes in video games to develop. Games such as Sea Battle (1981) and Sniper (1981) simply perfected the skills of shooting at moving targets. The communist regimes did not suppress video game production, but before the 1990s, all Soviet video games were primitive. The Soviet regime did not buy Western video games so as to save money and not compete with domestic game products. In general, the Communist regime rarely bought Western audiovisual products (movies, TV shows, etc.). The change came after the fall of the communist regime, when technology had become more sophisticated, and it became possible to develop more complex plots and themes in games, including historical ones.

Despite the opportunities that Russian history can give for the plots of video games, game developers have focused mainly on military issues and fighting the battles of the Second World War (Belyantsev and Gerstein 2010, 282). However, there are exceptions. In 2008, 1C Company released a military strategy game, XIII Century: Rusich, in which the player can enter into the role of the Prince of Pskov. Employees of the Chelyabinsk

Regional Juvenile Library created a video game, How the Urals Saved the Battle of Borodino (2012), modeled on the events of the War of 1812. The main characters of this video game, Ural teenagers, go to war in 1812 to fight the French. This game attracts lovers of history, adventure, and logic puzzles. One of the most popular video games about Russian history is the strategy game European Wars: Cossacks XVI–XVIII Centuries (2001) (see http://www.cossacks.ru).

It is worth noting that in recent years, Russian schoolteachers of history have tried to use video games in the learning process, as they provide an opportunity in an interactive way to "survive" the historical events, which boosts secondary students' interest in historical facts. The best of these video games not only impart knowledge of history, geography, ethnography, and culture, but they also help students to understand the causes and consequences of certain events and learn about what life was like for people of various eras. As such, games in historical settings need a certain knowledge base derived from history (Chernov et al. 2009, 46).

There are, in Russia, strategy-based video games that address recent history. For example, The Truth about the Ninth Company (2010) is a virtual reconstruction of the events of the war in Afghanistan in 1988. Another example of a game on the theme of contemporary history, Confrontation: Peace Enforcement (2008), opportunistically plays on the military events in Georgia and South Ossetia in August 2008, mixing history with fantasy (Russobit M 2008).

Unfortunately, historical video games in Russian schools are not extensively used because teachers are not well trained for such an activity, which reiterates the need for the development of media education that aims at raising the level of information literacy, media literacy, and media competence of people of all ages.

Domestic Video Game Production and Exports

One of the first specialized companies in Russia in 1991 was Gamos, created by E. Sotnikov. Gamos's 7 Colors (1991) and Color Lines (1992) found success with what was then a fairly narrow domestic audience, those who had computers. Gamos is best known for such video games as Sobor (1991), Sky Cat (1991), Columbus Discovery (1992), Balda (1993), Tank Destroyer (1993), Corners (1993), Kalah (1993), Magnetic Labyrinth (1993), Regatta (1993), Wild Snake (1994), Flip Flop (1997), Snake Battle (1995), Pilot Brothers: On the Trail of the Striped Elephant (1998), and Pilot Brothers: The Case of the Serial Maniac Sumo (1998).

Gamos's main competitor was the Russian company Nikita (renamed Nikita Online in 2007; http://www.nikitaonline.ru), organized by Nikita Skripkin in 1991. From 1992 to 1997, her company released educational video games Wunderkind (1995), Happy Birthday (1995), Twigger (1996), Magic Dream (1997), Parkan (1997), and others. During this time she was able to enter into agreements with a number of Scandinavian countries to obtain data on the educational games used on three thousand computers at kindergartens and schools. Since 1999, Nikita began producing browser-based minigames and entered the German video game market. From

2002 to 2003, Nikita, along with 1C Company, developed the first Russian multiplayer online game, Sphere (2004).

In 2006, Nikita released three important projects for the Russian market: the browser-based game WebRacing, the economic strategy game Truckers: Transport Company, and together with the television channel TNT, the online simulation game House 3, playing on the success of the reality TV show for youth (later, the project was called Avatarika). In 2012, Nikita Online relaunched the entertainment portal GameXP (http://www.gamexp.ru) with dozens of online games and social networking games. By 2013, the number of Nikita Online users had reached 10 million, and the company had developed more than 100 video games in a variety of genres.

In 1993, two years after the establishment of Gamos and Nikita, another Russian company, the distributor and video game producer Buka Entertainment, was created (see http://www.buka.ru/). In 1996, Buka created its first video game, Russian Roulette. Two years later, the Buka collection added the quest Petka and Vasily Ivanovich Save the Galaxy (1998). Since 2000, the company has developed new video games for children under the name "Bukashka." During the twenty-first century, Buka expanded its offerings, with Pacific Storm (2004) and Metro: Last Light (2013). Since 2010, the company has produced video games for the iPhone, such as Adventures of the Hunter (2010) (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHgYX3YZAEY). Another well-known Russian company, IT Territory, was founded in 2004 and is engaged in developing and publishing massively multiplayer online games such as Legend: Legacy of the Dragons (2006) and casual games. In December 2007, IT Territory became a part of the holding company Astrum Online Entertainment, along with Nival Online, Time Zero, and Nikita Online. Finally, the company Gameland is the leading publisher of game magazines including Land Games and PC Games, and the owner of the Internet portal http://www.gameland.ru.

Without downplaying the role of the "old" Russian companies that produced video games, it should be recognized that today Russia is dominated by relatively "new" companies for the development and creation of social online video games: Mail.ru Group (http://corp.mail.ru), Crazy Panda (http://crazypanda.ru), Crazy Panda (http://crazypanda.ru), Plar-), Plar-), Plarium (http://plarium.com/ru/), and Social Quantum (http://www.socialquantum.ru), which control 50% of the Russian video game market ("Review: Gaming market in Russia in 2011" 2012, 18). Mail.Ru Group is the most popular Russian free e-mail service, and also—as the operator of two leading Russian social networks, MoiMir@Mail.Ru and Classmates—owns a significant stake in the social network Vkontakte. Mail.RuGroup is actively engaged in browser-based video games (including games in social networks and mobile devices), and owns the rights to seventy online games in Russia, including the foreign Perfect World (2005), The Lord of the Rings Online (2007), Warface (2013), and their own developments such as Legend: Legacy of the Dragons (2006), Allods Online (2010), and more.

The young company Crazy Panda is another developer of social and mobile video games, such as Zaporozhye (2011), and its online games have (as of summer 2013) more than 50 million registered users. Among Plarium's hits are the popular video games Stormfall: Age of War (2012), War of Thrones (2011), MarketCity (2013), and Poker Shark (2012).

Indigenous Video Game Culture

Today, video games are not only used for entertainment, they are used extensively in teaching languages, history, geography, art, and science. But they still attract a broad audience, especially games that are fun and entertaining, with a fascinating story. In the spirit of postmodern trends, modern video games have absorbed almost the entire arsenal of entertaining tales and myths, comic books (with their brutal one-dimensional characters), and film genres (action, science fiction, thriller, detective, comedy, romance, erotica, etc.). According to Savitskaja, for players, the "official role" of mythology in modern computer games is

> *as a hidden language of the unconscious in common with the style of their dreams, hence the increasing popularity of psychoanalytic interpretations of games based on the identification of natural, virtual dreams with mass-market versions of virtualization awareness, one of the most popular formats of high-tech global mass culture (special effects in blockbuster movies, computer games, amusement parks, computerized laser shows, etc.).* (Savitskaja 2012)

Social communication skills are an important aspect related to video games, which include the ability to play in a band, the sharing of information about video games in networks, forums, chat rooms, and the use of mobile communications. For video game players, communication is characterized by the diversity of the virtual world (which is patterned after the real world or immerses players in a world of fantasy that encourages the development of creative thinking activities); the reversibility of acts done in the virtual environment (except, perhaps, in MMORPGs); and the anonymity of people entering into voluntary gamer communication in social networks, which is observed as far as it is acceptable for them (Yugay 2008, 22).The main properties of the virtual culture of video games (as a product of globalization) include bringing people together in new subcultures as a form of communication; the formation of new types of relationships that characterize geographic, democratic, and broad social and cultural differentiation; psychological manifestations of human creative freedom in virtual environments; and active use of the opportunities that are not available to a person in real life (Yugay 2008,12).

Video games can develop certain abilities, including skills involving working with three-dimensional and two-dimensional spaces, attention (selectivity and distribution), working memory, logical and strategic thinking (in certain game genres), and spatial reasoning. Typically, gamers make informed, deliberate decisions, but are also willing to take risks. According to some authors, a gamer's willingness to take risks can be useful in business (Voiskunsky and Bogacheva 2013, 4–5, 12–13). Negative effects are also possible, such as emotional enthusiasm that develops into addiction or causes a full withdrawal into the virtual world, resulting in irreparable damage to the health of the gamer. In addition, many video games that involve the user interactively in acts of bloody violence can negatively affect the psychological state of players, especially underage ones. I conducted research regarding the gaming audience in Taganrog, which showed that Russian students tend to choose exactly this type of game, with virtual worlds that allow one to kill with impunity and beat or fight opponents (Fedorov 2005, 88–96).

Boys are especially emotionally reactive and aggressive while playing video games, enthusiastically recounting the bloody scenes and weapons list. “My favorite game is about worms,” says Peter W. (seven years old). “They have ‘wet’ worms, so that the blood is sprinkled on all sides, for it gives life!” (Brevnova 2012, 22). Of course, video games clearly meet the need to discharge and release aggression in a safe direction for society, but the child “still very often confuses fiction with reality, especially since the game involves everyday activities” (ibid.).

A sociological study in Russia (the survey was conducted in December 2012 in cities with populations of more than 100,000 people; 2,033 people over the age of thirteen were surveyed) showed that motivation and behavior in video games is expressed as follows: achievement of goals in a game (76%), the training of intelligence and skills development (73%), immersion in a story and its atmosphere (64%), rest from everyday life (62%), entertainment (45%), obtaining an aesthetic pleasure from the game’s story/characters, etc. (33%), and playing with friends (19%) (“Game market in Russia” 2012, 22). At first glance, it seems paradoxical that the motive of entertainment gained only 45% of gamers’ votes. However, it should be noted that achieving the game’s objective (76%), immersion in the story and its atmosphere (64%), and rest from one’s daily routine (62%) in video games are also related to their main function, which is entertainment.

The average age of video game players among the urban population of Russia is thirty-three years (54% of them women and 46% men), 45% of them are married, and 58% have children (“Game Market in Russia” 2012, 13, 29), which proves that games are interesting to not only teenagers, but also adults. Furthermore, 87% of the Russian Internet audience plays video games more often than once per month, and 50% of them play every day. Due to the intense proliferation of tablet computers and smartphones, the number of Russian gamers who play video games on these devices has increased, to about 40% to 50% of the surveyed Internet users. And about 60% of Russian Internet users play video games online in cities with populations of more than 100,000 people. Most Russian players spend about 30% of their leisure time playing video games, both on weekdays and weekends. As much as 75% of Russian gamers are paying for the use of video games, and their spending on this hobby is approximately 19% of their total spending on leisure. Comparatively, the other major expenses of Russian gamers are restaurants and cafés (24% of total spending), sports (20%), and cinema (16%) (“Game Market in Russia” 2012, 24).

Thus, Russian video game players are said to form a subcultural association; “gamers share a certain view of the world, members of the gaming community have a similar status in the real world (a single age group, income level, and education). This community is characterized by its own symbolic level (attributes, symbols, jargon, and subcultural folklore). Gamers are aware of themselves as the elite community Homo ludens, and are a significant part of the network society, which has already become an integral part of many cultures of everyday life” (Vasilyeva, Efimov, and Zolotov 2009, 208).

In recent years, Russia has increasingly created special training courses on video games, in which university students learn basic approaches and concepts of cultural and anthropological analyses of video games, the history and theory of media and video games, and the structural and generic features of video games and computer games, and they learn to competently discuss the problems of the uses of video games in culture

and everyday life. Dr. Dmitry Galkin from Tomsk State University, Russia, developed the following content for the training course on video games:

- Introduction to the study of the phenomenon of culture studies problems of the game
- Historical and cultural analyses of the development of video games
- Genre structure and variety of video games
- Aesthetic features of computer games
- The narrative and visual structure of video games
- Cognitive effects: video games and the development of age-related problems
- Social effects: the proliferation of video games and violence
- Therapeutic effects: video games as medical instruments
- Gaming experience in a multimedia environment: trends and technologies (Galkin 2008, 2)

Video Game Players in Russia

Russian researchers of the twenty-first century have repeatedly addressed the topic of video games (Fedorov 2005; Tkacheva 2006; Savitskaya 2012; and others). According to I. V. Anisimova,78.1% of video game players are thirty years old or younger, and 90.3% are male. At the same time, young men prefer games with three-dimensional graphics, role-playing games, strategy games, and puzzle games, while girls prefer adventure games and card games (Anisimova 2004, 20). These studies prove that video games have aroused people's aggression, anger, addiction to the scenes of virtual violence, emotional alienation (Anisimova 2004, 20), and are addictive (Lipkov 2008; Piljugin 2010). Similar phenomena were identified in my own study of underage gamers in Taganrog (Fedorov 2005).

Comparing the responses of children from different years, we find an increase of interest in the virtual world not only in adults, university students, and grade-school children, but also in preschool children. In 2007, 80% of Russian preschoolers said that they have a home computer; by 2008, this figure had increased to 92%, and by 2009, it had risen to 98%. The percentage who were able to play and enjoyed playing computer games rose from 58% of preschool children in 2007, to 82% in 2008 and 94% in 2009. An even more rapidly growing number of children play computer games on their own without the help of adults; from 28% in 2007 to 62% in 2009. The most popular games among preschoolers are various video game simulators that allow the player to control cars, planes, and helicopters. Boys are usually more passionate about these games, whereas girls seem to prefer games requiring the care of virtual animals. (Brevnova 2012, 20–21).

While the sociological study of the urban population of Russia (with a sample of 2,033 respondents in cities with a population of over 100,000 residents) showed that 87% of the urban Internet audience plays video games more often than once a month, and 50% play every day ("Game Market in Russia" 2012, 11, 20–21), in the whole of Russia, these figures are much more modest, according to the research company GfK-Rus, which conducted a survey in April 2010 in fifty-two regions, territories, and republics of the Russian

Federation with a sample of 2,205 respondents (including small towns and rural populations, for whom Internet access is often difficult). According to GfK-Rus, the number of Russians who play video games totaled 28.4 million people (that is, not more than 24% of the adult respondents), 34% of whom play video games each day, which is 16% less than in cities with a population of over 100,000 residents. The number of video gamers in rural areas (17.7%) is significantly lower than the urban average in Russia (Davydov and Nemudrova 2011, 110–111).

In general, the share of gamers among Russian men is 32.6% (including 12% who are active), and among women these figures are much lower (16.5% and 4.9%, respectively). The sixteen- to nineteen-year-old age group accounts for the peak gaming activity (62.1% of these, including 30.3% with a very high level of activity). Among Russians ages forty to forty-nine, 15.1% are active players, and with a further increase in age, the figure is sharply reduced (Davydov and Nemudrova 2011, 111). If 45% urban gamers (in Russian cities with a population of more than 100) are married ("Game market in Russia" 2012, 13, 29), in general, only 19% of Russian married respondents play video games.

According to sociological studies, the typical domestic employment of video game players are school or university students (66.6%), employees with higher education (33.1%), or unemployed (31.5%), with the time spent by Russian gamers on video games at 126 minutes per day, on average (Davydov and Nemudrova 2011, 111). The largest subgroup, 34.2% of the total number of Russian players, make up the so-called conservatives, for whom games are an insignificant part of their lives. The average age of its members is 34.6 years, and it is the only subgroup in which the majority (56.2%) were women. Only 14.5% of "conservatives" play video games daily. But gamers who are "fans" (9.1% of Russian video game players) are young men with a mean age of 25 years. The average playing time for this group (often spent on online games and social network games) is the highest of all groups at 195 minutes per day. "These people tend to collect media about their favorite games, are interested in software development (a little less than half of them also want to become a developer). The most active fans get their information about new games from the media" (Davydov and Nemudrova 2011, 113–115).

Moreover, among the entire gaming audience, the most popular genres of games were puzzle games and jigsaw puzzles. They attracted 47.5% of respondents, whereas 30.8% prefer games like everyone else. In second place were racing games (41% of gamers' preferences), and in third, shooting games (27.1%) (Davydov and Nemudrova 2011, 117).

The Future of Video Games in Russia

As mentioned earlier, in recent years video games have become more and more popular in Russia, which led to the fact that at the end of 2012, profits from sales of various types of video games for the first time exceeded the profits of film distribution. Due to the rapid growth in sales of new generation TVs, a significant increase in games is possible, especially those capable of full HD and 3-D.

With the development and further expansion of the Internet in Russia (including niche rural areas), we can expect significant increases in the online game market, and with the increase in sales of smartphones and tablets will come increased profits from mobile games and cross-platform games.

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