Approaching an ecology of the games console: Three studies on the Sega Dreamcast

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ABSTRACT
This panel presents three different approaches to studying the Dreamcast: a platform study, a design history, and a marketing history. By bringing these three approaches in dialogue with each other, we hope to approach a broader, ecological view of the Dreamcast. This broader view might help us to situate other studies of consoles in the future.

Skot Deeming’s work offers an application of platform studies beyond the boundaries of a platform’s intended uses. Deeming explores the nature of gaming platforms once they have been expatriated from the marketplace. The Dreamcast has become a focal point for fan-based video game remix practices that subvert the proprietary protocols of digital platforms.

Zoya Street studies the console as a networked cultural phenomenon through its game worlds. Working from an interest in the console’s RPGs as virtual spaces, Street uses oral histories from players and developers to unpack the construction and reception of virtual space design. Linking close readings of the games themselves to a documentary history, his book Dreamcast Worlds makes sense of the social construction of the console at the site of play.

Mia Consalvo discusses early marketing surrounding the Dreamcast as well as Sega’s discursive positioning of the console as a multi-use device. Drawing on (as well as departing from) her work with Nick Montfort that positioned the Dreamcast as facilitating avant-garde expression, she detours to explore how Sega tried multiple pathways to encourage sales of the Dreamcast, paths which ultimately faltered in the face of the less exciting but solid promise of Sony’s DVD-enabled Playstation 2.