

## SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

BLUEPOINT GAMES: *Shadow of the Colossus* (PlayStation 4 version). [digital game]. Tokyo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2018.

[Juraj Malíček](#)

Whenever the relationship between video games and the art is somehow thematic, contained in the (open) concepts themselves, and when shifting from general considerations to an argument based on a reference which is, however, not a real argument, almost always the video games ICO and SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS, and sometimes THE LAST GUARDIAN will appear as examples of video games which somehow are or could be, should be art.

Unless they would not appear, which only means that the interlocutors did not play the games, do not know them or that they prefer other platforms and therefore they are bound by other video-game mythology.

ICO, released in 2001 on the Playstation 2 platform, was so different, so itself and at the same time so distinctive and strong that players and reviewers, because ICO was not such a commercially successful game, felt that when describing the game experience with ICO they should expressively reinforce this experience with the natural significance of the word „art“. The word, not the concept, but we might get to that later. Reviewers simply considered ICO to be art because the audiovisual component of the video game in conjunction with its game model, i.e. playability, was the holder of other cathartic qualities rather than qualities typical for video games.

What does it mean? Quite simply, ICO appeared to be different because it was more contemplative-meditative rather than hedonistic-orgiastic, it was more silent and slow rather than fast and loud, subtle rather than crude, rather Apollonian than Dionysian, rather introversial than extroversial, and so on. An action adventure that was neither too action-filled nor too adventurous with music, that does not roar but sounds, and with an image that does not flicker but illustrates.

An extraordinary experience, representing minority and on top of that, the name of the creator – Fumito Ueda.

ICO made sure that when Shadow of the Colossus came out on the same platform in 2005 it was no longer just a video game but it was the second video game of Fumito Ueda. The Fumito Ueda, the author of ICO. There was ultimately an arena for comparing and the author poetics could finally achieve respectability. Ueda, of course, was not the first and in no way the only designer of video games who began to be considered as the holder of a specific style but it was finally clear to a layman what was being referred to.

Because Shadow of the Colossus looked similar to ICO, it sounded similar, it was played similar, it gave out similar emotions.

A story trapped by mystery, with its own mythology felt behind it, a non-heroic looking hero, a rather shrugged boy, an ethereal girl to be rescued, disenchanted, rescued, not to take her by the hand but to defeat sixteen monsters. The game takes place in the exceptionally vast open air, in a diverse landscape, with the diversity defined by the same art style. Video games discovered chiaroscuro. The hero rides a horse throughout the coun-

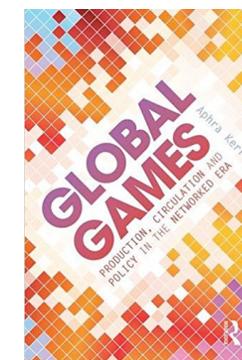
try, the reflection of the sun's rays from the blade of the sword, the colossus must first be found and then it must be figured out how to beat them. It is the same yet different, poetic like ICO, but more accessible. Shadow of the Colossus became a video game representing good taste. Again, the word 'art' was exploited abundantly, as if art was something more than a game, as if art added something to the game, something that is not natural to the game. Art as a higher level of the game, the next thing that video games are aiming for in order to get some rehabilitation. It is not a self-serving pastime, waste of time anymore but it can already bear some true values.

Regardless of the extraordinary amount of naïve ideas of art that have appeared in the rhetoric describing the uniqueness or otherness of the Ueda games, the fact remains that both ICO and Shadow of the Colossus indicate how much video games have changed over the last two decades.

It is the struggle for their own dignity – as an expression of this struggle are discussions about video games and art – but the struggle has turned into open door banging. Overall, video games are treated as copyright works, just like films, novels or operas, and what is most important, video games have identified their own canon, they have been mollycoddling it and taking care that the canon really lives.

Those who are interested in video games more deeply, more essentially, those who do not consider them as an immediate pastime but as something that has its own history, poetics, language, those do not have a problem to return to the old games on new platforms, and that is extremely important. Playing a game for twelve hours, alone, offline, immersing oneself in the story, experiencing it, thinking, feeling, becoming part of it – this experience alone can be new for players two generations younger for whom playing equals a playing online experience that they simply did not expect from a video game. And some may like it, just like some viewers like old black-and-white, silent films. Because of this, the canon makes sense.

That is the reason why ICO and Shadow of the Colossus were released together on Playstation 3 in 2011 and this is also the reason why Shadow of the Colossus has been released for the third time on Playstation 4. Of course, this game looks a bit different, it is renewed but it is exactly the type of renovation that basically does not change anything, it only reaches out to the fact that time is passing. It would be less comfortable to look at the unrenovated battle cruiser Pořomkin, an unrenovated Shadow of the Colossus would be played less comfortably, there are no other significant differences.



## GLOBAL GAMES: PRODUCTION, CIRCULATION AND POLICY IN THE NETWORKED ERA

KERR, A.: *Global Games : Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*. New York : Taylor & Francis, 2017. 228 p. ISBN 978-0-415-85887-8.

[Róbert Halenár](#)

Dr. Aphra Kerr is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Maynooth University in Ireland. Global games: production, circulation and policy in the networked era is a book based upon ten years of her discussion and research. As the au-

thor says, „this book aims to provide a theoretically robust and empirically informed but accessible analysis of the political, economic, social and cultural factors shaping production in the digital games industry and analyze how it is globalizing its production operations and localizing its content and services to reach the most lucrative markets“.

The book situates game production in the contemporary socio – historical context. It examines how the influence of liberal democracy and late capitalism in Western developed societies exists alongside the state – driven capitalism of China and other forms. The focus of the book is on commercial market productions. It also provides examples from non – market public, artistic and amateur productions, particularly where they are connected to networks of commercial productions.

The second chapter examines the structure of the games industry at a macro level. It also tries to determine the influence that globalization, the western financial crisis, changing policy regimes and technology have had on trends over the past decade.

The third chapter explores how the digital games industry produces its games and what type of work is involved. The author believes that just as work has become more socialized in the information industries, employment has become more individualized.

Chapter four sets out to challenge the perception, that while marketing gets some attention, other processes are often overlooked – “dismissed as below the line, as non – creative and non – strategic”. It is described how marketing departments have become involved in player acquisition, the analysis of player data and content generation aimed at customer relationship management. The author also explores their growing ability to collect, manage and utilize business, technical and player data. She believes that an area which is crucial to the circulation of games is localization, which often begins at the creation stage where code and assets are internationalized and made ready for localization.

Chapter five analyses policies aimed at encouraging game development in particular locations. The author looks at different situations in Europe and North America or Canada and in China or South Korea where policies are framed in opposition to neighbouring countries, and finance is targeted at the development of healthy games drawing upon historical themes. A related trend which this chapter explores is the rise of collectives, communities and pop – up events that are bottom up, underground and not driven purely by the market. The final aspects are new legislative and regulatory acts and concerns, which again vary across space and offer us a way of thinking about how companies, states and other participants attempt to shape game production.

The author in this book focused on changes in the professional production of market – orientated digital games as they harness and adapt to online and offline networks. She also examined broader organizational, institutional, legal and policy shifts and tensions surrounding these changes. She believes, and we must agree that the digital games industry provides media, communication and games scholars with a rich terrain for research – enabling us to challenge and renew existing theories and concepts.

Aphra Kerr in this book provides a very complex introduction to every step of the game lifecycle. Production of a game is a very complex area in which can be found a wide variety of influences. It must have its main idea coming from historical contents or everyday needs, it must have a target group which can bring the game to real economy life, it must have a production team which starts from the basic facts

known about the games field. In the first phases of lifecycle it requires a huge human input, work, ideas, time and of course capital. The socio – historical context may be different in every country around the world, but only if the main idea is right, can worldwide success be achieved. This book takes a look into the complexity of game production and defines several milestones in this path.

Only a complex team can provide a complex background of success production. Successful games must be supported by the strong structure of the games industry at any level. Aphra Kerr describes the influence of globalisation at a macro level, western and eastern cultures, policy regimes with their indirect influence. Also financial crisis and technological progress is not forgotten.

Production teams are people located in their environment, from which they receive ideas. Aphra Kerr describes the effect of, for example, social networks on game authors and employees.

After mass production the next step is the marketing of a game. It has to be creative because a new game must be interesting and strategically effective to be able to present the product in a very short space of time. Customer referral seeks only such a game that will appeal to him and hence the task of marketing is to convey information in a short hand form.

Around the world exists a network of players with which players are involved, as well as associations and companies producing games. This network covers data in the form of games and their ideas on one hand, and on the other hand data that travels as feedback from players. The entire interchange mechanism is continuous and interconnected. Many companies do not only process the data, but convert it into new products. The gaming net is then fed by this circle, as detailed in Aphra Kerr's book.

Business around the world has the same goals but can have different local policies. The Global Games book also deals with these differences based on the different historical circumstances of each region and country. These differences between Western Caribbean countries such as North America, Canada and Europe or China, South Korea and Japan are described in the book. Different perceptions of fun and humour, actions and drama must be taken into account not only in the game but also in communication and marketing. The book accompanies and draws on the various currents and trends that have a fundamental and spill-over effect on the area.

Digital games are expanding around the world. No part of society is completely immune. It is therefore very important to know the rules that move these worlds and which are also involved in transforming our society. This book by Aphra Kerr is definitely an important part of this international information exchange. In the digital world, which is invisible to our eyes, the mechanism of the creation and consumption of individual game components is revealed. At various stages, it shows the impact of social factors, historical ties, economic opportunities, plural efforts and motivations of individuals and societies. All this is displayed over a longer time horizon and by taking into account changes in individual cultures. Aphra Kerr has created a book that can be an encyclopaedia of the past, or a manual for the future. In one place, it gathers comprehensive information about the world of digital games in a global company.



## BECOMING A VIDEO GAME ARTIST: FROM PORTFOLIO DESIGN TO LANDING THE JOB

PEARL, J.: *Becoming a Video Game Artist: From Portfolio Design to Landing the Job*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. 219 p. ISBN 978-1138824935.

[Anna Hurajová](#)

John Pearl is a design director and principal artist at Gunfire Games. Over the past 17 years, he has worked in different positions including for example, character art director or technical art director, which enabled him to work with a number of different styles and genres of games while in these positions. He is one of the founders of Gunfire Games and the author of the *Darksiders Franchise* including the recent *Darksiders II: Deathinitive Edition*. Not being a researcher involved in truly academic research, the author's ambition was to write a book that would be "a testament of the community within the games industry of people who want to see others succeed." The video games industry is a growing industry. With more people getting into gaming there is a greater demand for talented artists to construct video games. John Pearl knows this well because he is a concept artist with long experience.

The title of this book suggests a comprehensive overview of the general concepts and skills an individual needs to acquire to get into game development and land a job. The game industry has continued to grow over the years. Nevertheless, competition in getting a job in video games still remains fierce. *Becoming a Video Game Artist* endeavours to guide readers through all the stages, from making a portfolio to being successful in a job interview. The book is filled with detailed descriptions of the types of jobs, their responsibilities, the required skill sets and characteristics of professionals as well as interviews with working professionals about their career advice and experience. During the last 17 years, the author has worked in different positions within the game industry and his close work with artists in other disciplines such as concept art, user interface, visual effects and animation as well as having reviewed hundreds of portfolios for various art positions has resulted in writing this detailed and comprehensive book.

The book consists of eighteen chapters and an introduction written by the author himself. It explores the different jobs related to the video games industry and their responsibilities. Furthermore, each chapter contains questions raised to various industry professionals in the form of interviews to enhance the readers' understanding. The book is not intended to teach future professionals how to draw or construct their ideas, nor is it meant to teach them to design and it certainly does not have any ambition to improve their artistic abilities. What the chapters will present to them is to begin the experience of a career in video games industry by teaching them how to make their portfolio stand out from others, what to expect once given a job in the industry and what it takes to become a concept artist or designer working on professional games for studios.

The chapters may notionally be divided into thematically oriented sections focusing on different aspects of getting a career in video games. Leaving aside the Introduction, which is the author's personal contextualization of the issue, the second chapter entitled 'General Concepts and Skills' looks at some general skills and personal traits that are of-

ten required to get any art-related game development position. The chapter deals with the universal skills for any development position and that are vital for any game artist, such as creativity, attitude to solving problems, team collaboration, excellent communication skills, a readiness to 'prototype' something, to implement new character types or animation techniques for the game, or the ability to be organized and to work under tight deadlines.

The next seven chapters, from chapter three to chapter nine, focus on key skills and the core competencies of different artists which are listed in job postings. John Pearl explores the key professional skills required to be an animator, a character artist, a concept artist, an environment artist, a technical artist, a user interface artist and a visual effects artist. Each of the chapters includes relevant information related to the job and an explanation of the fundamental elements of the games on one hand, and one or two interviews with various former game artists on the other. The interviews provide first-hand accounts while also reinforcing the topics. Moreover, visual examples are provided throughout the chapters to reinforce the learning objectives of the book. At the end of each chapter, the author refers to upcoming chapters that deal specifically with preparing a portfolio for different artists to allow them to demonstrate their skills and competencies as described in the previous seven chapters of the book.

The following section of the book, including chapters ten to seventeen, deals with crafting a portfolio for different art jobs. Chapter ten explores 'some of the general concepts and theories behind building a strong portfolio' (p. 99). It primarily focuses on principles to keep in mind when assembling a portfolio and covers universal ideas that are applicable to any of the art disciplines. If there is any weakness in the book, it may be the treatment of the general concepts and theories. The background behind building a strong portfolio is clearly described, also accompanied by an interview, can easily be understood and is generally adequate. On the other hand, however, general theories are not dealt with as well as the question of the practical implementation of key skills, responsibilities and competencies into the art portfolio.

In chapters eleven to seventeen, the author immerses 'more into the specifics of tailoring a portfolio to a particular career path' (p. 99). The chapters are practical, providing information on key items related to specific art jobs and giving advice and recommendations by experienced professionals in the form of interviews on how to craft a good portfolio. Animation in games, character art, concept art, environment art, technical art, user interface art and visual effects art are highly competitive fields and the aim of the book is to help a reader's portfolio 'stick out from other portfolios' (p. 132).

The last chapter of the book represents the final section and is focused on the preparation that should be taken into consideration before applying to a company, namely writing a cover letter and looking at the interviewing process. This may be perhaps the least exciting part of the book to read because, as the author himself remarks, cover letters are often a formality and 'may never make it to the portfolio reviewers or even to the hiring managers' (p. 197). These views are, however, refuted by the professionals' answers in the interviews included in the chapter.

The comprehensive scope of the book covers all important aspects of a career in the video games industry. Rather than being a theoretical book on video games, the work may be considered a 'roadmap' in guiding those who seek a job in the field of video games. The different art related jobs and their responsibilities are explored utilizing an understandable and enjoyable approach. The book is well written. The layout of the chapters and visual examples make it clear and attractive. To sum up, the book should be considered a good choice if one wants to learn about the challenges of art-related jobs before getting one's foot in the door of a video game company.

# Butterfly Effect, the new education program

At the beginning of September 2017, several Slovak well-known companies (i.e. Edufactory by Pixel Federation, Sygic, Leaf, HubHub) introduced an original project bearing the name "Butterfly effect". The term means that even a small change at one end can bring about a large change at another. The purpose is to prepare students and professionals to conquer one of the most competitive arenas, known as digital business.

The program is founded and hosted by top experts from three main fields: graphic design, programming and business, from international companies and successful start-ups. They will share their know-how and teach students in the Games lab to develop games, and in the Apps lab to improve their business solutions via mobile platforms and to work on their own apps. The main partners are thinking about the future of Slovakia in the digital world. They emphasize that the program will be focused on real case studies, workshops and discussions with experts to inspire the future generation. There is so much one can learn and take from this: from a great network, through a new community of like-minded people, to advanced craftsmanship in the wire-framed world.

Eight Slovak universities have joined this education program and the following three universities have offered support to their students: the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics in Košice and the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava. The best students from the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, who apply for a full time educational program lasting 6-12 months starting January 2018, can receive financial support from the university. In order not to miss out on the academic year, students are offered a special individual study program. The Dean of the Faculty, doc PhDr. Petranová, PhD. said, that success is granted to those who study hard and undertake research in the areas of digital games and digital marketing. The aim is to enable students to develop the skills and knowledge which they have acquired during their studies at our Faculty.

Butterfly effect is a completely new and attractive program of practical education for digital business to educate talented students from Slovakia.

## Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference Digital Games Life & Afterlife

The Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference 2017 was held in Trnava, Slovakia at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication on September 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>. It aimed to integrate the community of Central and Eastern European game scholars and professionals and served as a platform for academic exchange and networking. The conference was a continuation of the events hosted by Masaryk University in Brno in 2014, Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2015, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin in 2016. Its purpose was to establish a platform for game

studies scholars from and beyond the region and to facilitate the emergence of a unique perspective into the international arena of game studies.

The theme of the CEEGS Conference 2017 was Digital Games' Life and Afterlife. A wide variety of topics were presented by 70 leading university scholars from 15 countries. A range of differences between digital games and other media, history, life and the viability of digital games at the present time and in society were thoroughly discussed. Two high-quality workshops were held, one bearing the title, Games and Monstrosity (J. Švelch, University of Bergen and D. Vella, University of Malta) and the other, Digital Games Markets in Post-Socialist Countries (S. Buček, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, T. Z. Majkowski, Jagiellonian University)

Conference participants had the opportunity to hear from some fantastic keynote speakers and many other presenters. Melanie Swalwell from Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia captivated listeners totally with her lecture entitled Practice makes persistent: On history, temporality and memory. She sought to bring the contemporary moment into dialogue with the past, tracing the ways in which some microcomputer users were deploying their deep knowledge of – and love for – 'obsolete' systems and coding routines. In her keynote speech, the author and journalist Tristan Donovan reflected interestingly on the process of writing and researching his 2010 book, called Replay: "The History of Video Games. Back to Reality". Espen Aarseth from IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark presented his paper, entitled "Back to reality": The case against ludo – fictionalism.

The CEEGS Conference 2017 was held in Trnava at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Slovakia and the place of the next conference will be announced soon.

## UniCon

The Unicon Games Festival, which is organized yearly by teachers and students of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Trnava champions and showcases the cultural power of interactive entertainment. In February 2017, it attracted over 1000 people. This year's Games Festival takes place between Friday, 13 April and Sunday, 15 April. The Games Conference, the leading event of the festival will announce the Call for Papers.

The 2017 festival started with a welcome event, where game fans played an old game called "Maxihra" and enjoyed the wit of the two entertaining game commentators Andrej Bičan and Didiana. It was complemented with an abundance of interesting and diverse activities, so much to do for everyone, great for gamers, kids and adults alike. The mascot of the Festival was Crash Bandicoot.

A series of panel discussions were held on the following topics: "Roleplay vs. Cosplay, Games in Education and Esports Events in Europe". At the same time, three workshops were being realized with expert guidance. The Virtual Reality workshop introduced HTC Vive, Microsoft HoloLens, Samsung Gear and PlayStation VR. The Retro Games workshop presented old computers and consoles including PlayStation 2, but also offered PS4 and Xbox One. The Gaming Keep workshop presented board and social games. It was all filled with hands-on opportunities for all visitors, who tried out many new and old games.

Digital game tournaments were also hosted by the Festival over a two day span. A Cosplay contest was prepared as well, offering the opportunity to enjoy some iconic game characters and designs. The Unicon Games Festival in Trnava offered an exciting and diverse array of events, explored the positive power of digital games and virtual technologies over three days of keynotes, panels, tournaments and workshops. The Festival will return this year and will provide many new surprises to be announced soon.