

Games and Toys

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Juraj Malíček is an associate professor at the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, where he focuses on the theory of popular culture with an emphasis on its broader philosophical and aesthetic contexts, particularly in the interpretive tradition of pragmatism and neo-pragmatism, which are his starting point also within the history of cinematography and interpretation of film work. He teaches these disciplines in the approbation subjects of aesthetics and aesthetic education. Occasionally, he publishes in journals, books, and online. He likes shopping in stationery stores, collecting action figures, and prefers a shotgun in digital games. In the animated movie, *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, he dubbed the character of a geek (who asked Groot what kind of tree he is) for the Slovak language version.

A gorilla is hurling barrels after a plumber.

Almost forty years later, I am jumping around the living room, sweating, gasping, doing squats with a hoop in my hands, and thinking if it might be a better idea to exercise normally. For the sake of my health, not that I would want to out of choice, I have to because many years spent sitting and playing digital games left me in bad shape.

But no, digital games are not to blame, I have been desperately uninterested in physical movement ever since childhood, and it's not getting any better. Nevertheless, I spend at least twenty minutes every night, jumping around in front of the TV, really regularly exercising for the first time in my life, and even really enjoying it. Actually, this is the second time. Something like this happened to me once before. I loved ski jumping, just virtual, of course, and if the Wii pad was still working, I would carry on jumping even today. Actually, it was not possible to really jump, just to jiggle about; your feet had to stay in one place. That was not always possible, so therefore the equipment pretty quickly got broken.

Such nonsense by the way. A controller you stand on.

Today, instead of that, I'm squeezing a plastic hoop in *Ring Fit Adventure*, with the second Joy-Con attached to my right thigh, and fascinatingly thinking about how someone could invent this. Not too deeply, I'm too tired from exercise, but can manage just enough to realize the huge variety with which a relatively modest reservoir of movements can be used in a game mechanism and not look stereotypical. There probably exists some special term for it that I should know, if I still felt the need to theorize about digital games, but since I don't feel that need anymore, I don't care, and I'm just enjoying the game itself.

The goal is to defeat an extremely muscular demon, a black mountain of anabolic steroids. The game itself is actually a very straightforward linear adventure, and nobody would even care two hoots about it, if it was not a game designed for recreational sporting activity.

I don't like to think of Switch as an investment, it's just a very sophisticated toy, without which we could cope perfectly well, so why pretend it's something else. Although, I still can't shake the feeling that it was really well-spent money.

I really exercise regularly, and it's nothing more than physical suffering, but that's okay, that's how it should be with exercising. It's good when it hurts. At the same time, however, I realize that it is actually counterproductive because digital games have also become so popular because they have been acting substitutively. Within a fictitious world, they allowed us to do something that we were not able to do in reality. Until I started driving, I liked car simulators. Even today, I still like to play them, but it's better in reality. I have never skated, I couldn't do it, but I was glad I could at least try it in a digital game.

Today, when I play and don't exercise, I am usually fishing, which I could also do in the real world, but in a digital game, it's more comfortable. And so I come to *Labo*, which is actually even more useless at the core. The autonomous digital-gaming world is no longer enough, we are returning to reality, at least partially, and the means to do that are by using new equipment, which we make out of pre-printed cardboard. And it's fun again. Virtual playing is connected with playing in a physical reality that is actually (and at least partially) a denial of the fundamental meaning of digital gaming. We do something imaginary because it isn't possible in reality, we can't do it, or it's too complicated. *Labo* offers an acceptable compromise. We play with physical objects and, at the same time, we play in virtuality, and since it's actually double play, it's twice the fun as well.

After all, Nintendo was founded as a toy company a long time ago, and it has remained so until today. Toys disguised as technical devices, but toys nevertheless. And while dust is slowly covering the VR kits of both PlayStation and Xbox, companies who are refusing to admit to themselves, perhaps due to obstinacy, that virtual reality is a dead-end. Nintendo bet on folding cardboard and once again stole a march on everyone. Like there really is no more creative activity than inventing toys.