



## THE DEBATE GOES ON: THE VIDEO GAME DEBATE 2

KOWERT, R., QUANDT, T. (eds.): *The Video Game Debate 2 : Revisiting the physical, social, and psychological effects of video games*. New York, London : Routledge, 2021. 130 p. ISBN 978-0-367-36872-2.

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Considering digital games have been present since the 1940s<sup>1</sup> ground-breaking books about their sociological and psychological effects would probably more or less fit on one bookshelf. An interesting recent addition to this collection is *The Video Game Debate 2*.

A publication consisting of ten autonomous thematically ordered chapters was edited by T. Quandt and R. Kowert. T. Quandt studied journalism, psychology, film and cultural studies and currently works as a professor at the University of Münster. His academic interests include media addiction, the social aspects of digital games and cyberbullying or presence within virtual spaces.<sup>2</sup> R. Kowert studied Counselling Psychology and is currently the Research Director for the non-profit organization Take This providing mental health information and resources to the gaming community and industry and is also the Chief Scientific Officer at Kitsune Analytics. Her research interests cover learning within digital games, gamer's well-being and Internet Gaming disorder or video game involvement.<sup>3</sup> Eleven other experts contributed to the publication, i. e. the well-known expert in problem gaming and gaming addiction M. D. Griffiths (author of *Gaming addiction components*<sup>4</sup>). Targeted at both students and scholars, the book places a great emphasis on the definitions of key concepts with to a mostly psychological tune overall. Together with other academics from the domain of gaming psychology (e.g., J. Madigan, A. Kriss, J. McGonigal), the authors perceive digital games as an area with vast potential (not only commercial, but also social and that of personal development).

The book is loosely based on the previous volume published in 2016.<sup>5</sup> While *The Video Game Debate* focused on what we nowadays consider 'classic' topics of video game discourse such as the history of video games, aggression and violence, gaming addiction and internet gaming disorder, social aspects of gaming or cognitive impact of digital games, *The video game debate 2* offers more specialized and not so frequently covered topics such as loot boxes, e-sport, the therapeutic use of digital games or mobile gaming. In its first chapter the book connects to its predecessor and further elaborates on previously outlined debates. The domain of games is rightfully more differentiated and divided into video games, online video games and mobile video games. Chapter 2 discusses the question whether loot box buying could and should be considered a form of gambling alongside the issues of predatory monetarization. It offers an insightful overview

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1 MAGO, Z.: *Úvod do štúdia digitálnych hier I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2020, p. 23.

2 Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt. [online]. [2021-05-10]. Available at: <<https://www.uni-muenster.de/Kowi/personen/thorsten-quandt.html>>.

3 KOWERT, R.: *About Me. Background*. [online]. [2021-05-10]. Available at: <<https://www.rkowitz.com/about>>.

4 GRIFFITHS, M.: Diagnosis and management of video game addiction. In *New Directions in Addiction Treatment and Prevention*, 2008, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 28. [online]. [2021-05-10]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273948544\\_Diagnosis\\_and\\_management\\_of\\_video\\_game\\_addiction](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273948544_Diagnosis_and_management_of_video_game_addiction)>.

5 For more information, see: KOWERT, R., QUANDT, T. (eds.): *The Video Game Debate : Unravelling the physical, social, and psychological effects of video games*. New York, London : Routledge, 2016.

of countries based on whether they considered loot boxes in relation to gambling regulations. Chapter 3 pursues questions such as *What are serious games? How do they work? What do we need to learn about serious games?* It is enjoyable that R. S. Jacobs does not perceive serious games as a single mass but divides them into games that teach/educate, games that train/develop skills and games that persuade/change behaviour. Additionally, he acknowledges the fact that 'classic' games can also be utilized for educational purposes but they should be modified to a specific educational goal or at least accompanied by debriefing. His text calls for validated design principles solely for serious games (not derived from other fields like media studies or psychology) that are still missing. Moreover, he states that designers should question their core assumptions about what makes a good game and rightfully addresses important issues of flow (a concept from the psychology of creativity) along with the cognitive load and limited capacity of our cognitive system.

The presented work does not overlook (in Chapter 4) exclusionary practices within gaming communities. Even though promoting plurality in gaming, the authors completely omit that men as well can be susceptible to stereotypization, violence and sexism. On the top of that, the part considering techno masculinity as a form of symbolic violence seems exaggerated. Considering the academic tone of the publication text, this chapter would benefit from a larger amount of academic sources abandoning its rather essay-like style so that we don't come across generalized statements such as: "While solitary gamers may show an increase in aggression..." (p. 47). More so the previous Video Game Debate book outlined the complexity of the violence debate.

If there is in 2021 a person who doesn't know what Twitch is, he/she should read the fairly descriptive Chapter 5. Apart from the introduction to this videogame streaming service and the discourse of male streamers dominance it offers an implication that services like Twitch, though robbing viewers of the game's interactive potential, are basically interactive in new ways when we are not interacting with the game, but with the streamer and community. Moving forward to e-sports, it mentions that e-sports have been ignored for quite a long time by the psychology of digital games despite the fact that they are a multibillion industry and professional gamers are a specific group. In this section e-sports are defined as "organized video game competitions" (p. 67). Authors discuss how they differ from gaming in general as well as from sports. Another overlooked area is that of mobile gaming regardless of its fair share of overall gaming activities. Chapter 9 highlights the place of mobile gaming within the gaming universe, the difference between mobile and portable games, their history (from their antecedents of portable toys and cards to mixed reality mobile gaming) and gender specific play patterns. Another chapter (no. 7) presents the rather rare topic (at least until Kriss's *Universal Play* came out in 2019<sup>6</sup>) with an extremely wide application potential. With the help of a digital game we are not only able to defeat a monster in a game, but also the 'monster' within us. As a part of therapeutic practice digital games can serve as a 'safe space' (for trying out emotions, roles, decision making, gender identity), means of increasing emphatic traits or examining the phenomenon of projection, building frustration tolerance or facilitating catharsis and abreaction. The chapter does not fail to mention the importance of a narrative and pays attention to concept of archetypes even though author understands them more broadly than, for example, C. G. Jung.<sup>7</sup> Chapter 8 further expands this topic into virtual, augmented and mixed reality while being illustrated by three insightful case studies.

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6 KRISS, A.: *Universal Play: How videogames Tell Us Who We Are and Show Us Who We Could Be*. London : Robinson, 2019, p. 169.

7 For more information, see: JUNG, C. G.: *Duše moderního člověka*. Brno : Atlantis, 1994.

To conclude, we are witnessing a gradual transition regarding the perception of games towards more unbiased discussion. Not so long ago, gaming used to be perceived by gamers through rose-coloured spectacles, while the public perceived it in the worst case as a path leading to violence and addiction. Indeed, The Video Game Debate 2 has something to offer to both of these groups as well as to groups in between. The leitmotif of this work is stated by the editors in the final concluding chapter: game research needs to adapt to changes in the gaming industry. At one point, R. Kowert and T. Quandt compared game research to a deer in the headlights staring into the blinding lights of dominant debates instead of moving on. The editors successfully managed to lure this deer into a forest full of adventures where there is not only already a lot to see, but simultaneously a lot to explore. One should keep in mind that the presented chapters have a cross-sectional character; therefore each topic should be individually studied in more depth. Nonetheless, The Video Game Debate 2 is enriching reading for students, academics and even game design experts.

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