



MAKING GAMES: THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF GAME CREATION TOOLS

WERNING, S.: *Making Games: The Politics and Poetics of Game Creation Tools*. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2021. 158 p. ISBN 978-0-262-04483-7.

Magdaľéna Švecová

The publication of the not very long scope *Making Games: The Politics and Poetics of Game Creation Tools* belongs to a series of books, which are published under the common title *Playful Thinking*, by MIT Press. The aim of the publication is to provide a broader scope showing various aspects of game studies, but also the development of games in compact form. The publication was created to show not only new perspectives on digital games, but also forgotten ones, in the form of reasonable arguments from a wide range of authors and experts with more or less conventional theories, but also a characteristic passion for games and gaming. The shorter scope accompanies not only the acclaimed book *Making Games*, but the whole series, and is its intention. This book by Stefan Werning, Associate Professor of Digital Media and Game Studies at Utrecht University, confirms that about 120 pages (excluding chapters, references and notes) are enough to explain the impact of the development tools used on the overall result of a finished digital game.

Werning, as a long-term researcher in the field of game design and also with experience in working in the digital games sector, draws on his experience and seeks to outline an innovative view of the factors that influence the final product of a digital game, focusing primarily on the tools. Although he also focuses heavily on traditional game creation software, the book provides a number of examples from gaming practice that show everything that is possible and actually is a tool for game development. Although the reader expects more detailed case studies, Werning focuses more on the quantity of examples that he links to game design concepts. However, what is admirable and extremely beneficial is that it perfectly connects the reality of game development with the knowledge of esteemed authors, such as M. Sicart or I. Bogost and many others. However and maybe more importantly, he links knowledge about digital game development tools with established theories from the digital media environment. Here the author uses his academic background and knowledge from film and visual art and also from authors such as L. Manovich, M. McLuhan, M. Deuze and connects them with digital game phenomena into a logical whole, while creating his own conclusions useful for further research and study. Thanks to this, the book is understood not only by academics from the field of game studies and by game developers, but also by readers from the media field.

The book is divided into three chapters. In the first part, Werning deals with the overall concept of digital game development tools, which in his case is a meta-introduction rather than just a description. He begins his story with a good example of the game called #IDARB, in which people from all over the world participated via the social network Twitter and which became popular thanks to the way it was created. Werning use this example at the very beginning on purpose and his aim is to outline what the book will be about and that game development should be looked at out of the box. Although the book describes the advantages and disadvantages of digital games created by Unity and Unreal Engine and considers how prefabricated assets affect the result just as much as producers, in his

book he brings a number of other innovative ways of creating games from spreadsheets to the games themselves. Returning to the first chapter, Werning very gradually explains the origin of the instrument and returns to its essence through ontological, communicative and aesthetic frameworks. He often compares the creation of games to the creation of other media and artistic products, currently most often to bricolage, with which we cannot agree more.

The second chapter focuses on shorter tool essays focused on various phenomena. Unfortunately, in this section, the reader gets lost under the burden of concepts of digital tools and also under the weight of the author's ideas, which could be conceptually connected. It is respectable that the author is able to analyse the tools on the basis of older as well as new game titles. The passage about the phenomenon of fans is especially beneficial, when companies make their software available to the general public, and so they can spread the tools among amateur creators, who are therefore more faithful to the games from software studios.

The last chapter is the most interesting in terms of content, because it illustrates selected phenomena in more detail than we saw in the previous chapter. Werning approaches the creation of games from various angles, saying that the creation of a game itself can be a game, which he illustrates, for example, by the use of game jams as creative tools, which are not only fun for a handful of amateurs, but also for employees of large development companies. It also shows that creating a game can be a performative process in which future players can be involved as an audience watching the game. Focusing on presenting a work can also influence its development, for example in terms of time. Last but not least, it explains how narratives resulting from socio-cultural or historical assumptions influence the creation of the game, but also, for example, the distribution of the game product itself.

The publication *Making Games: The Politics and Poetics of Game Creation Tools* succeeds in what it was initially aimed at: to show the role of development tools, their capabilities and their limitations in the design of digital games. Werning confirms this with countless arguments supported by case studies, but also with a large number of theories, that development tools, which do not necessarily have to be just software, frame and shape the aesthetics and political economy of games. Werning manages to open a new door for readers to look into the world of digital game creation, calling for evocative tool design, envisioning games not just as products but as a form of expression and reflection. Awareness of what a tool is will help both developers as well as academics to find innovative solutions and create more efficient ones, because it is the tools that shape us and shape what we create, as Werning mentions in his very important book.

Author of the review

Mgr. Magdaléna Švecová, PhD.

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

Faculty of Mass Media Communication

Námestie J. Herdu 2

917 01 Trnava

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

magdalena.svecova@ucm.sk