

## VIDEO GAME AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

**Summary:** In this article, we are dealing with video games as popular culture phenomenon in terms of their social, cultural and technological significance. There is a discussion about what video games actually are. Some scholars claim it is an art form, other claim it is a medium. We are discussing about a position of video games in contemporary culture, accepting that a video game is created and manufactured in some society and often reflects, in subtle and sometimes not easily recognized ways, the beliefs and value system of the society in which it is made. There is also a discussion about video game culture as it has been defined as a subculture marked by certain tastes and as an art form. We are also dealing with video games as new technology phenomenon because playing electronic games on a personal computer, a game console, a handheld device, or on the Internet is a relatively new, but increasingly popular, kind of mediated entertainment. Observing video games, identification and popular culture we might say that far less attention has been devoted to game content. A small number of research projects have been done to analyze the way the world is represented in video games. Herein we argue for a critical cultural study of games, rather than a study of game culture as such.

**Key words:** video games, cultural phenomenon, art form, technological phenomenon, popular culture

### Introduction

*„Each successive generation of video games has become more technologically sophisticated, more realistic, and more violent. The newest wave of video games, based on CD-ROM technology is, in face becoming more like film and television than what we traditionally expect of a video game. This is a major evolutionary step beyond the simple graphics of the classic Space Invaders arcade game so popular fifteen or twenty years ago, or the tiny animated cartoon figures of the Nintendo system that have dominated the video game market in the recent years.”*

Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr (Steinberg and Kincheloe, eds, 1997:104)

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Much like cultural studies, the study of video games has relied on borrowing techniques from other disciplines, including anthropology, economics, philosophy, psychology, film studies, and so on (Boellstorff, 2006; Mortensen, 2007). Although they are both interdisciplinary fields, however, game studies has not drawn deeply as it might from cultural studies, particularly its critical and reflexive tendencies though notable exceptions do exist (Shaw, 2010:405). This is problematic as cultural studies could help video game studies approach the field in very productive ways.

What is video game culture, however? What does it mean to have a culture defined by the consumption of a particular medium? Moreover, what are the implications of defining this culture in a particular way? While there has been a great deal of ink split on video game culture, the actual definition of the term is often treated as common sense. Unpacking the discourses surrounding “video game culture” allows us to see the power dynamics involved in attributing certain characteristics to it, as well as naming it “video game culture” as such. This has implications for how video games are studied and is connected with how culture is studied more broadly. By critically examining how video game culture has been defined in both press and academic articles, this paper illuminates how this definition has limited the study of video games and where it can move.

There is some confusion about what video games are. Are they an art form with many different genres, similar to the novel or some kind of medium? There are decent arguments that can be made for both positions. Video games are interactive, but there are other texts and media that are interactive. The novel is an art form using medium of print that has many different genres – everything from genre stories such as mysteries and science fiction stories to non-formulaic, non-genre stories about individuals and their relationships. Thus, there is a wide spectrum of novels – everything from tough guy mysteries like Mickey Spillane’s *I, the Jury* to James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Berger, 2017). We would like to suggest that video games are probably best understood to be similar to the novel in that there are many different genres of video games; both novels and video games are then, art forms.

Grasping the implications of this means moderating, or even giving up some of the available positions within cultural and media theory, especially those that are associated with the analysis of discourse or with the insistence on interpreting everything as if it were a medium of communication implicated in the circulation of ideology (Kirkpatrick, 2011). In place of this, the video game asserts a revived role for the concept of form, which has itself been much neglected in recent aesthetic theory.

We would like to consider that all video game studies must approach games as culture, but that those scholars that do approach video games through the lens of culture should adopt the same critical and reflexive approaches to culture that cultural studies has (Berger, 2017). Herein we argue for a critical cultural study of games, rather than a study of game culture as such.

## **A position of video games in contemporary culture**

Defining video game culture serves to separate it from “the regular” culture, much as mass culture was separated from high culture in earlier critiques. One di-

chotomy set up in both academic and press discourses, as seen in cultural critiques more generally, is a distinction between video games as popular and video games as art. Much of the effort to get video games “taken seriously” has relied on arguing for their aesthetic or moral value (i.e., serious games). This is done by showing the video games are worthy of academic study (Shaw, 2010) or can encourage social justice. To be relevant then, video games must mean something outside of their entertainment medium niche. If game studies are to learn anything from cultural studies, however, it should not take for granted the ways in which certain types of games, modes of play, and types of players are used to validate this field of study.

More Americans are well aware of the existence of video games. There are occasionally articles about video games in newspaper and the New York Times regularly carries a feature on new video games every Thursday in its „Circuits” section. There are also articles on the industry and various games in magazines such as Time and Newsweek, and there are many magazines devotes to video games and hundreds (if not thousands) of Internet sites on every conceivable aspects of video games (Berger, 2017).

When scholars write about video games, they often use the term „form” to discuss them. For example, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin write, in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* use the term remediation to deal with the ways in which new media refashion prior media forms (Berger, 2017). This concept may help us understand how to categorize video games.

Another author, Eugene F. Provenzo, also uses the term „form” in dealing with video games. He writes his essay „Video Games and the Emergence of Interactive Media for Children”:

„We argue here that video games represent a new frontier for media in our culture. Video games are complex and rapidly evolving form – one that most parents and adults pay relatively little attention to.”(Provenzo, 1997)

The video game is created and manufactured in some society and often reflects, in subtle and sometimes not easily recognized ways, the beliefs and value system of the society in which it is made. These values are filtered through personalities, social class, beliefs and values of those who actually design and create games. This means that works of art, in all media, always contain elements of the personalities and life experiences of their makers and also of the societies in which their makers grew up. Video games are played in many countries, so they have to also relate to the interests of players all over the world. For example, many popular video games are created in Japan but are popular in the United States and many in other countries (Berger, 2017). Video games makers must keep in mind the nature of their audiences – in particular how old the players will be – and their particular interests.

From books that look at Gaming as Culture (Williams, Hendricks, & Winkler, 2006) to journals such as Games and Culture (SAGE), there is a great deal of academic buzz about video game culture. There has been a great deal of “cultural” work done around video games, particularly in the past 10 years. Authors look at video games in relation to thinking learning, gender, children, war and so on. The

great majority of recent work on video game culture centers on massively multi-player online games (MMOGs) like *Everquest*, *World of Warcraft*, or *SecondLife* (Shaw, 2010:404). In these areas, authors look at video games with regard to knowledge acquisition, identity and performance, representation, and the relationship between media and audiences.

What is video game culture, however? What does it mean to have a culture defined by the consumption of a particular medium? Moreover, what are the implications of defining this culture in a particular way? Although there has been a great deal of ink spilt on the subject of video game culture, writers usually treat the actual definition of the term as common sense. As King and Krzywinska point out, however, “the most potent ideologies achieve precisely this status, being taken for granted as part of the ‘commonsense’ understanding of particular regimes, rather than recognized as ideology” (2006, p. 188).

The study of video games as cultural texts or the culture of video games relies on many of the differing understandings of culture outlined above. Video game culture has been defined as a subculture marked by certain tastes and as an art form. Some look at games as social practice. Analyses of the video game industry are also used to define game culture, for instance, define video game culture by way of the major discourses used by members of the video game development industry.

Dovey and Kennedy (2006), for instance, define video game culture by way of the major discourses used by members of the video game development industry: “Games culture is ... a critical site where discourses around technology, technological innovation, and technological competence converge with dominant conceptions of gender and race”. They describe how these discourses shape who is allowed into the industry (as acculturation is a requirement for entry into the field) and the effect this has on the products. These examples demonstrate how video game culture has been defined in the academe. Video game scholars, however, tend to write about the culture from the inside, as many of them identify as gamers. Journalists, however, tend to write about video gaming from this outside. Game studies academics often try to describe video game culture against the mainstream discourse. Likewise, journalists often quote, or misquote, game scholars. To get a sense of what is meant by games culture, we must take account of how it has been described in the popular press as well as the academe (Shaw, 2010).

What They Play Beyond studying games culture, Steinkuehler (2006) argues that games can also be studied as cultural artifacts. It is logical then, that the second category used to define video game culture in the press is the textual products the culture produces. The news articles emphasize a predilection for violent fare elaborately created fantasy worlds, fast-paced high action games, and MMOGs. Sports games are mentioned but largely in the context of games changing “real sport” culture, rather than being part of video game culture. This is important, as the texts we use to define video game culture affects what we deem worthy of study.

Press discourses about video games further affect the study of games as video game academics tend to study the games that are most controversial, like a recent edited volume on *Grand Theft Auto*, or that get the most news coverage, like *World*

of Warcraft and SecondLife. The work of journalists and scholars has also helped construct a history of video games in which particular game texts, like Pong, Space Invaders, and so on, have been canonized. What is important here is not that particular game texts and images have become exemplars for what gets defined as video game culture. The problem is the lack of reflection on which objects earn that status. Early games like Space Invaders and Pong did not just emerge out of the ether, nor did SecondLife or World of Warcraft. The complex interweaving of social networks, mainstream and video game press coverage, marketing, economics, and so on, all go into what makes a game popular. Moreover, “[a] considerable part of how games mean as cultural artifacts depends on how agent/reviewers apply a variety of influential forces in the work they do of evaluating titles for agent/consumers” (Shaw, 2010:406) and, for example, demonstrates how the marketing for the game Tomb Raider limited the potential feminist readings of Lara Croft and anchored her image as a pinup rather than a hero.

Beyond the games, a certain geek style has also been correlated with video game culture. Articles mention the pervasiveness of symbols of video game culture in the “rest” of culture, like pixelated characters from early video games or digital music. Such assertions ignore the intertextuality of most media and the interrelationship between different media industries, like film, television, video games, toys, and so on. Shaw (2010) offers a very specific definition of gamer culture as “marked by modes of dress, specific linguistic jargon, and a sense of solidarity. Gamers often wear clothing that references specific games, comics, television shows, or movies that are not widely known outside of a small following”.

Describing video games as a subculture on the basis of style and taste markers is not wrong per se. However, it only tells part of the story. It also often results in not looking at this subculture as part of a larger culture. Cultural studies offer a rich history on which game studies could build in this regard. In his book *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige (2010) moves beyond just the fashions and musical tastes that mark youth punk subculture by tracing these expressions of culture to class identities and tensions. Placing video games within larger cultural discourses is important, as video games themselves are the product of larger cultural contexts. King and Krzywinska (2006) assert, for instance, that although game play in some ways is a subculture of subcultures, it is also a part of mainstream culture. “If game playing has an array of niche cultures, and the broader subculture of self-identified ‘gamers,’ it has also established a place in the much wider landscape of popular culture and entertainment in recent decades” (p. 222). Cultural studies have been subject to much internal debate and critique, and although game studies have come to draw on the concepts and subjects of cultural studies, it has not taken on the conflicts.

### **Are video games an art form?**

Video games are not communications media in any standard sense but objects that furnish us with particular kinds of experience. These experiences are a variety

of game, or structured play, but they are also something more than this. What this 'more' is, what it consists in, is the enigma that has triggered the most heated academic debates about the video game and how we should study it and I argue that it is best understood as a historically specific instance of aesthetic form (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Starting in the late nineteenth century, modern art tested the limits of the aesthetic paradigm by opposing form to semblance and presenting its audience with a different kind of puzzle. With conceptual art, which has been dominant since the 1960s, it became clear that the sensory aspects of the work were no longer central and could not play the criteriological role assigned to them by classical theory, to such an extent that some argued literally anything could now be art. The location of the work in an institution and not the way the work plays with us to generate pleasing sensations of form and pattern, tells us what art is and what is not. This can be viewed as a liberation of art from aesthetics. But if we assume that play and form are things that humans naturally find pleasurable, surely we are justified in asking what has become of them if they are not to be found any longer in art? In the midst of these changes, Theodor Adorno (Kirkpatrick, 2011) suggestively alluded to popular culture and electronics as possible alternative locations. Drawing on Ranciere's (2007) concept of the art image, the chapter suggests that the video game object mirrors it and that its inner workings exhibit tensions that require the subject of traditional aesthetic theory in order to function. In this way, the video game makes a kind of call to art and aesthetic theory.

Kirkpatrick (2011) claims that the video game is in some ways an inversion of the modernist artwork. The latter presented itself as a puzzle to the viewer. It remained physically static but presented us with an experience of form. This form we traced out internally by following the order, or script, set out by the work. The whole process was informed by a sense of semblance – the idea that the work resembles or represents something else – that constantly receded. In its abstraction, its refusal of semblance, the modernist work left us dissatisfied but almost teased by the possibilities it opened up. The experience of form turned against semblance in modernist works was a reminder that a better world is possible. Kirkpatrick (2011) also cites Adorno's phrase, the work 'points beyond itself'. With video games, the game object is never static. It presents images and sensations that are familiar, that seem to resemble. But it too is a puzzle. The challenge of the video game lies in extruding play and form, which are no longer located internal to the subject, but have to be performed through manipulating the controller. This active play differentiates video games from 'new media art', which is usually appreciated only contemplatively. Through play, we activate the game and deepen our understanding of its true structure. This takes us past the scattered shards of meaning that seemed, when we first started playing, to be part of a coherent image, perhaps of a virtual world. In the depths of this process, we are no longer in touch with the game's fiction, but endeavour to master its routines. Games often leave us with a feeling of guilt, of having wasted too much time on something meaningless and empty. This feeling is integral to video game aesthetics and reflects their profound ambivalence when viewed in the perspective of contemporary cultural politics.

Speaking about form, Berger (2017) says that authors use the term „form” because there are so many different genres of video games. Just having different genres, however, is not a proof that we are dealing with an art form. Media such as film, radio, and television also have many different genres, so there is a logic to arguing that video games are a new medium. What is most important is that we analyze video games and try to understand their impact on the people who play them and on society at large.

We can think of each video game as a text, a work of popular art that is created collectively (like films and television programs). Video games are created by teams of writers, artists, musicians, and various kinds of other technician. In critical parlance works of art are calls „texts’ to make easier for writers and scholars to talk about them without having to name them or describe them every time. These video games are created by authors (teams of writers and artists) and created in particular society, directed toward a specific audience and players on a familiar medium – the television screen or computer monitor screen(Berger, 2017).

There are particular audiences for video games. That explains why there are many different gender or kinds of video games. If we take an art form such as the popular novel, we may see that there are many different genres of popular fiction, such as detective novels, science fiction novels, romance novels, spy novels, western novels and adventure novels.

The same applies to video games. There are many different genres of video games such as action adventure, sports, science fiction, simulations and role-playing. It is difficult, at times, to assign a particular genre to a video game because in recent years video game designers have mixed genres together, in the same way that many novelists have (Berger, 2017).

Trying to decide which genre a given game should be put in is worth doing, since it tells us something about the nature of the game, but we must keep in mind that as in other kinds of texts, sometime a game has elements of several different genres in it. For example, many games are combinations of action and adventure or adventure and role playing, though usually one of the two blended genres is dominant.

It makes good sense to think of video games as a kind of text that comes in many different genres and blended genres – and thus as an art form – rather than seeing video games as a new medium. There are many video artists who use video to make texts of all kinds, some of which are very avant garde. These texts are not games, however.

Contemporary art practice has reduced aspirations in relation to what Jacques Ranciere (2009) calls the ‘regime of aesthetic art’, and this can be seen in its retreat from form. Through play and form the modern artwork of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a political intervention that worked on the human sensorium to shape and alter our expectations. The ‘free play’ of the artwork was a reminder of the role of imagination in shaping reality, while the resulting form spoke of a better world to come. Now discussion of play in the work of art has become exclusively conceptual. Formerly art played with its viewers, heightening the activity of the imagination and presenting various kinds of challenge to cognition. Now

play is rarely discussed as an important part of the response triggered by the artwork in its human audience. Instead, its playfulness concerns the medium (which can be anything); the exhibition space (is it art just because it's in a gallery?), and the artist in society (is it art because she made it?). Similarly, the concept of form has been denounced and renounced in much of art practice since the early 1960s. This was also the time that the video game was invented; when William Higginbotham created the first tennis-based game and Steve Russell made 'Spacewar!'. No doubt that is a coincidence, but it is also a curious fulfillment of prophecy. Long before the rise of conceptualism, Walter Benjamin (Kirkpatrick, 2011) envisaged a time when imagination might run free from the constraints set by art and thought this might be a good thing. Perhaps there is a space in the culture for expressive experimentation that works with some of these neglected elements of the artistic tradition. When imagination is liberated it gives rise to play and form and in so doing calls forth new containers for those things. If the video game is such a container then the questions raised by its success for cultural politics are not the ones we thought we had to ask when we were preoccupied with whether games are violent, or sexist, or whatever. It is this starting point that distinguishes the aesthetic approach to video games within contemporary cultural theory.

### **Video games as new technology phenomenon**

The books *Comic Book Culture* (Pustz, 1999) and *Television Culture* (Fiske, 1989) provide two different versions of discussing media culture. The first, like video game studies, relies on a conception of fan culture as a singular entity defined by its own language, rituals, and tastes. The essence of the book is an effort to make respectable an often undervalued medium and readers. This is a valuable goal but perhaps, like video game studies, a bit too reactionary. Putz's focus is on what others have said about the author's in-group, rather than critically reflecting on the ways in which the comic book culture has been structured. This is particularly reflected in the erasure of women and queer comics' histories from his historical overview. Fiske's book, however, situates the codes and representations of television within larger social and cultural ideological structures. Fiske discusses the specific qualities of television in relation to broader issues like gender and class. He also offers a much broader analysis of different types of television programming, something game studies does only cursorily. Shaw (2010) argues that play is an intrinsic part of culture, not something separate from it. Indeed, other authors work attempts to situate video games in a larger convergence culture. Only one press article, however, describes video games in relation to a broader national culture. In doing so, it affirms an East/West distinction between games that are produced and popular in North America and those in Asia.

Playing electronic games on a personal computer, a game console, a handheld device, or on the Internet is a relatively new, but increasingly popular, kind of mediated entertainment. The popularity of video games<sup>1</sup> has arisen alongside the public's expression of serious concerns, in particular with respect to the effects of violent games (Thompson, 2002). The scientific community has responded to these worries

by executing dozens of studies about the effects of playing video games (Jansz, J., & Martis, 2007).

So the medium of video is not the only important thing as far as understanding what video games are. The important thing is to analyze the video game phenomenon and certain important video games and see what they tell us about ourselves. What has happened is that as the technology of video games has evolved, from diskettes to CD-ROMs and DVD discs, the nature of power of the games has changed considerably. The technical quality of the images and sounds in these games has improved to such a point that it can be suggested that they represent something relatively new in the entertainment world – *interactive narrative texts with multi-dimensional characters*. These texts now have the capacity to involve players to an extent unknown in earlier days, when the technology of these games was much more primitive.

The remarkable development in video game technology have led to what, one might suggest, is a new entertainment form. It is one that now closely approximates film in terms of the qualities of image and sounds generated by the new video games devices but it is different from film in that players now can immerse themselves into the film-quality texts and participate in them (Bergen, 2017).

What is interesting to note is that now films are being made from popular computer games. Films may make „lousy” computer games, as Card asserts, but we don’t know yet whether computer games will make „lousy” films. A number of films, of uneven quality, based on video games, have already been made and others, such as one based on *Tomb Rider* are currently in production.

According to many critics, all texts are related, in various ways, to previous texts and to older media. We do not want to suggest that the new video games are totally different from any of the games that were created before them. But the new machines make possible a considerably different game playing experience from earlier games, such as *Pong* and *Pac-Man*. That is the point to be made.

It is far to argue that video games, in general, are a new popular culture phenomenon, and the more recent video games are major transformations of the earlier games. We’ve had video games for something like thirty years, but it is only recent years, with the development of new consoles with incredible powers, that video games have been able to evolve into much more powerful and sophisticated works.

Unit operations are segments of code that define an action structure for the video gameplayer and for users of programmed artefacts more generally. As Bogost points out, such chunks of programmed activity are becoming increasingly salient in the culture, almost to the point of indiscernibility in some contexts. For Bogost, these operations are inherently meaningful, because they are agreed upon by human beings in a cultural setting. Indeed, he goes so far as to see unit operations in games as constituting ‘procedural rhetorics’ (Bogost 2007), or arguments that motivate action. This seems to me to overload the concept with content it does not need to have in order to play the important role of clarifying the formal pleasures of video gaming and, indeed, to help develop a theoretical conception of the character of contemporary life and culture.

## **Video games, identification and popular culture**

The content of games is an understudied area in social scientific research about video games. Previous research on game content has revealed that stereotypical masculine characters dominate video games and that those characters are generally White. Nowadays, quite a few video games have women in leading parts; *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft is the prototypical example. In their study Jansz and Martis (2007), investigated the so-called 'Lara phenomenon,' that is, the appearance of a competent female character in a dominant position

Far less attention has been devoted to game content. A small number of research projects have been done to analyze the way the world is represented in video games. Generally, the results of these content analyses show two things: first, the ubiquity of violence, and second, the stereotypic portrayal of gender and race – men hold dominant positions, women are submissive, and the majority of game characters are White (Jansz, J., & Martis, 2007)

New definitions of game culture are never used to question the constructed past of video game culture's insularity, maleness, and youthfulness.

Acknowledging broader types of gaming seems to be mainly the province of marketers, for whom having a wider range of gamers is more profitable. Similarly, World of Warcraft's popularity is tied to its appeal to both hardcore and casual players (Shaw, 2011).

The implication of narrowly defining video game culture, even while simultaneously acknowledging the expansion of this category, is that game studies scholars who study the "others" to this dominant definition are forced to talk about their subject in relation to the perceived center. This is often the case with studies of women gamers (Cassell & Jenkins, 2000). Most studies of gender and video games take it for granted that "girls" and "boys" play differently and that 408 408 finding ways of dealing with that can help make video game culture more accessible to female players (Cassell & Jenkins, 2000).

Cultural predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships. Drawing from such a thesis, Herbert Schiller, a pioneering critic of cultural imperialism, examined the role of American mass communication systems and policies. He criticized the capitalistic U.S. media and their dominance through the global export of TV programs (Chen, 2013). Schiller's view, which agrees with other critical views from the Third World, is known as "cultural imperialism." After more than three decades since the introduction of cultural imperialism, many researchers have adopted this thesis to examine the dominance of the United States and the consequential decline of indigenous cultures. For example, Dorfman and Matterlart (Chen, 2013) claimed that American cultural products, imbued with a capital ideology, helped normalize and naturalize the social effects of Western capitalism in less developed countries. A study of high school students in the Philippines concluded that American TV programs could influence the students to embrace U.S. value over their own . Another

study involving Israeli adolescents found that heavy viewers tended to hold a better image of American life, with wealth and a higher standard of living being prominent. Media imperialism has also stirred restless debates because of its simple assumption of one-way flow of global media (from the West to the rest), especially as the global cultural economy became increasingly complex in the late 1980s. In a study on Brazilian TV programming and transnational reception, Straubhaar argued that media flows in the global economy are not only one way and that audiences are inclined to choose national or regional TV programs rather than American imports on account of “culture proximity.” Critics further asserted that global cultural flows involved a complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order and incorporated the dynamic movements of ethnic groups, technology, ideology, and other facts (Chen, 2013). Recent developments in media and cultural globalization theories emphasize the form of cultural hybridization rather than dominance. Hybridization demonstrates local resilience and the capacity to assimilate and incorporate foreign culture into domestic life. This theory argues that indigenous cultures have been stimulated and innovated instead of declining.

Research on the portrayal of gender and race in entertainment media is particularly relevant because of the way in which media content is received by its users. Previous researchers from a variety of backgrounds have shown that media representations provide an important source for the construction of meaning in everyday life. People actively interpret what they have seen in the media to attribute specific meaning to, for example, their social relations or their identities (Jansz, J., & Martis, 2007). In the case of video games, the reception of media content has a specific character because of the games’ interactive nature. Players are largely in control of what they experience. They can change what happens in the game by some motor action via a controller, joystick, keyboard, or another kind of interface. When players stop interacting, the game falls dead.

Interactivity has two distinct consequences for the reception of game content. First, enjoying a video game generally means that players are drawn into the represented world and become less aware of the mediated quality of the experience. The resulting feeling of ‘being there’ is generally referred to as a state of „presence”. Presence conceivably may intensify the gamer’s reception of game content in order to construct personal meaning. Second, interactivity may also have consequences for the gamer’s identification with characters represented in the game. Many video games enable their players to enact identities in the most literal sense of the word. Gamers can actually ‘be’ their characters in a playful virtual reality. The opportunities for playfully probing identities are unique (Jansz, J., & Martis, 2007).

Whereas many reception studies about traditional entertainment media underline the importance of identification with media characters, research on identification with game characters still is in its infancy. The possible identification with video game characters provides an important rationale for research about game content, in particular about the kinds of roles and identities that are portrayed in games (Jansz, J., & Martis, 2007).

## Conclusion

Drawing on Angela Ndaliansis's (Kirkpatrick, 2011) thesis of a contemporary, neo-baroque, it suggests that we find in video games an excess of form that overrides and negates meaning even as it repeatedly invokes it. Games need meanings; fictions and resemblances are integral to them, but the activity of playing games is powerfully corrosive to these fictions and analysis of these processes undermines the idea of mimesis in the video game object. Moreover, it reveals that the process of corrosion, of dispelling meaning, is essential to gameplay.

Video games are profoundly ambivalent for cultural politics. The experience of form they offer us is not articulated to any future that is different from the world we are in now. At the same time, their challenge awakens in us a sense of our own agency and its importance to activities of 'world-making'. Choosing to play video games still has the power to annoy and to cause controversy and can be a form of deviancy or norm-subversion.

Observing video games in cultural and technological context, we might say that video games permeate education, mobile technologies, museum displays, social functions, family interactions, and workplaces. They are played by many if not all ages, genders, sexualities, races, religions, and nationalities. Not all of these types of play and players can be encompassed in a study of an isolated gamer community. Moreover, the reification of certain types of game texts over others limits the field of study. Finally, the concerted effort of game academics to disprove the negative connotations of video game play and not the positive ones is problematic. This is problematic as cultural studies could help video game studies approach the field in very productive ways.

We would like to consider that all video game studies must approach games as culture, but that those scholars that do approach video games through the lens of culture should adopt the same critical and reflexive approaches to culture that cultural studies has.

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## ВИДЕО ИГРА КАО КУЛТУРНИ ФЕНОМЕН

**Сажетак:** У овом раду бавимо се видео играма као феноменом популарне културе у смислу њиховог друштвеног, културолошког и технолошког значаја. Још увек траје дискусија шта су заправо видео игре. Неки научници тврде да су уметничка форма, док други тврде да је медиј. У раду разматрамо положај видео игре у савременој култури, констатујући да видео игра осмишљена и произведена у одређеном друштву често рефлектује, на веома суптилан и тешко приметив начин, уверења и вредности друштвеног система у ком су настале. Рад се наставља анализом културе видео игре, са аспекта супкултуре коју прате одређени елементи, као и видео игра као уметничком формом. Видео игра је и технолошки феномен, јер подразумева играње електронских игара на рачунару, конзолама, бежичним уређајима и на Интернету, што је нова али изузетно популарна врста медијатизоване забаве. Разматрајући видео игре, идентификацију и популарну културу, можемо да закључимо да је јако мало пажње усмерено на садржај видео игара. Мали је број истраживачких пројеката који су анализирали начин на који је свет представљен у видео играма. На крају дајемо аргументе за неопходност критичке културолошке студије видео игара пре него студија играчке културе као такве

**Кључне речи:** видео игре, културолошки феномен, уметничка форма, технолошки феномен, популарна култура