

tions also arise that are not addressed or resolved by the editors. Most noticeably, the first essay (Håvard Vibeto's "The Spectacular Design of First-Person Shooters: Remediating Cinematic Spectacle in *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* and *Battlefield 4*") claims twice that games do not reproduce cinematic editing: "the lack of editing in video games enhances the effects known from cinema" and "video games do not use editing" (pp. 23, 29). The very next essay, Bernard Perron and colleagues' "The Discourse Community's Cut: Video Games and the Notion of Montage" contradicts this claim. The apparent disagreement between these two essays (and why the two of them happen to begin the collection) is unresolved and unremarked.

Overall, the collection contributes to the scholarship on intermediality and games, and some essays such as Summers's make new and generative claims. Other individual essays may interest scholars working on the presence of specific media in games (or vice-versa), such as photography (Sebastian Möring and Marco de Mutiis's chapter), comics (Armin Lippitz's chapter), or literature (Jason I. Kolkey and Marco Caracciolo's chapters). Ultimately, the sum of the collection's parts may be just as valuable as the whole.

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### **Video Games Have Always Been Queer**

*Bonnie Ruberg*

New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019.

Introduction, acknowledgments, notes,

works cited, index, and about the author.  
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Bonnie Ruberg's monograph *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* serves to empower the LGBTQ+ community in video game culture. This book puts a variety of games in conversation with critical queer theorists while also drawing attention to nonnormative methods of design and play. Its chapters are divided into two parts; "Discovering Queerness in Video Games," containing chapters 1 through 4, and "Bringing Queerness to Video Games," containing chapters 5 through 7. Ultimately, this book argues that ludic spaces have always been queer and facilitated queer identities.

In chapter 1, "Between Paddles: *Pong*, *Between Men*, and Queer Intimacy in Video Games" Ruberg relates the idea of homoerotic desire in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) to the mechanics of Atari's 1972 arcade game *Pong*. Ruberg identifies *Pong*'s lack of theoretical analysis due to its simplicity and asserts that by comparing these formative works, they are strengthening their argument that any game has queer potential. In Sedgwick's theory, women are used as objects through which desire is exchanged between rival male subjects. Ruberg relates this erotic triangulation with the movement and mechanic of the ball that is bounced between players. In this parallel, each pathway of the ball can be seen as "a vector of desire" (p. 47) the characteristics of which define the connection between the two players and the intensity of their exchanges. Such political readings

of video games are repeatedly discounted by reactionary gamers as unnecessary and tangential to their primary purpose: to entertain. The second chapter, “Getting Too Close: *Portal*, ‘Anal Rope,’ and the Perils of Queer Interpretation” challenges this ideology by championing the validity of “too close,” socially charged readings of games. For this defense, Ruberg invokes an essay by D. A. Miller on Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 film *Rope*, which explores the homoeroticism in the film’s camera work. Ruberg uses Miller’s framework to analyze the queer intimacy and relationship dynamics between the player-character, GLaDOS and the Companion Cube in Valve’s 2007 game *Portal* while refuting the criticism of Miller’s original essay.

Ruberg often calls for readers to look beyond explicit representation of queer identities in the search for queer themes. Chapter 3, “‘Loving Father, Caring Husband, Secret Octopus’: Queer Embodiment and Passing in *Octodad*” discusses how Young Horses’ 2014 game *Octodad*’s difficult control scheme and exaggerated physics allow players to inhabit a non-normative body and attempt to “pass” as a human father. Chapter 4, “Kissing for Absolutely No Reason: *Realistic Kissing Simulator*, *Consentacle*, and Queer Game Design” expands this analysis from modes of control to complete systems by focusing on two games the design and structure of which resist heteronormativity—Jimmy Andrews and Loren Schmidt’s *Realistic Kissing Simulator* (2014) and Naomi Clark’s *Consentacle* (2017). Ruberg discusses how *Realistic Kissing Simulator* challenges the notion that games, like sexual intimacy, must move toward a predetermined goal with its lack thereof. In

Ruberg’s treatment, *Consentacle* highlights the systematization of trust earned and exchanged between romantic partners and the game’s biologically ambiguous, action-based card mechanic. Each player can perform the same set of sexual actions; “gaze,” “kiss,” “penetrate,” “restrain,” and “release.” Ruberg asserts that this reinforces that pleasurable sex does not have to “involve acceptably normative bodies interacting in narrowly prescribed ways” (p. 130).

In chapter 5, “Playing to Lose: *Burnout* and the Queer Art of Failing at Video Games,” Ruberg refers to Criterion Software’s 2005 game *Burnout Revenge* as an example of joyful, fantastic failure to dismiss the widely held belief that losing is painful. Chapter 6, “No Fun: Queer Affect and the Disruptive Potential of Video Games that Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt,” goes on to discount the idea that games should be primarily designed to be fun. Ruberg explains that games, in fact, inspire a range of positive and negative emotions that are not accurately captured by the concept of fun. This chapter also discusses the recent popularity of empathy games, which—according to some—have an ability to allow players with privileged identities to insert themselves into the experiences of marginalized people. Ruberg unpacks the appropriation of these experiences as problematic and suggests that “we need an adjustment of affective expectation from empathy (an appropriation of queer experience) to compassion (an increased awareness of sensitivity toward queer experience)” (p. 180).

Queer play is discussed in this book as blatant resistance to the actions deemed to be appropriate by the game itself. Chapter 7, “Speed Runs, Slow Strolls, and the

Politics of Walking: Queer Movements through Space and Time” introduces the ideas of queer temporality and queer spatiality which refer to a tempo of play that resists chrononormativity. Ruberg points to both the practice of speed running and the genre of walking simulators as instances in which these temporal conventions are subverted.

I cannot overstate the importance of the contribution that this book makes to both queer studies and game studies. With this text queer people can reclaim a space for themselves within a culture that has often proven to be vitriolic and discriminatory. However, the strategies outlined in this book are so focused on facilitating close readings of games that literal representation of queer identities feels discounted. The spirit of this work is reflective of the labor, both emotional and physical, that queer people have done throughout history to create their own sense of belonging within a heteronormative society.

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**Gaming the Iron Curtain:  
How Teenagers and Amateurs  
in Communist Czechoslovakia  
Claimed the Medium of  
Computer Games**

*Jaroslav Svelch*

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018. Series foreword, preface, acknowledgments, a note on translations and pronunciation, introduction, appendix of important dates, glossary, notes, bibliography, and index. 315 pp.

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The first wave of affordable microcomputers that became available in the late 1970s and early 1980s changed the course of millions of lives: to have a real computer at home would have been unimaginable just a decade earlier. Many early enthusiasts look fondly back to those early days, and currently retro computing (games in particular), is more fashionable than ever. Colorful coffee table books evoking nostalgia lay at one end of the spectrum, but occupying the other are research papers and books that represent scholars’ ongoing efforts to analyze the home computer era. Many of these accounts have been notably Americentric, or focused on other hotbeds of the gaming industry, such as Japan or the United Kingdom. Only relatively recently have authors started paying attention to so-called “local histories,” expanding the geographical scope of the history of computing, and unearthing peculiarities specific to less-known hobbyist communities all over the world.

Jaroslav Svelch’s *Gaming the Iron Curtain* is one of the few books that lets us peek into a very different time and place—namely communist Czechoslovakia of the 1980s, where a blooming computer culture emerged and grew in the shadow of a totalitarian regime. Fortunately the book is available in English, unlike several other interesting publications, thus making it available to a wider audience. It is hardly a surprise that the topic seems deeply personal to Svelch himself—judging by existing studies, researchers often focus on their own definitive years; former mainframe users study mainframes, home computer scholars were whiz kids of the 1980s, and so on. In the case of local his-