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## Review: Handbook of computer game studies


### Abstract:

Review of Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein: Handbook of computer game studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England: MIT Press 2005.

By more than 450 large-format pages the publishers offer a view of current research in the field of “game studies”. With almost no exception, the 27 articles are of high quality. Readers, however, who are familiar with the works of the single authors are offered only little new information. Unfortunately, the authors mostly focus on western, particularly US-American games and players. But still the book can be recommended both as a consolidating introduction and a textbook.

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By more than 450 large-format pages the publishers offer a view of current research on the phenomenon of "computer games". In their foreword they emphasize their claim of the handbook being "unique in including the broadest range possible of perspectives on gaming – those from cognitive science and artificial intelligence, developmental, social and clinical psychology, history, film and theatre, cultural studies, and philosophy." In most respects they meet this demand, because of which the book can be recommended to anyone looking for a comprehensive, easily understandable but not superficial introduction into "computer game studies". The book may be considered most suitable also for teaching purposes.

However, some gaps must be stated. At first the least surprising one: the lack of an article from an explicitly ethical perspective. In my opinion, however, the lack of the economic and inter-cultural perspective seems to be more serious. The lack of an economic article is regrettable in so far as at least in western countries computer games are on the verge of outstripping other media like TV or cinema, something which may be supposed to have appropriate effects e. g. for the advertising business. The lack of the inter-cultural perspective is as regrettable. I consider it one of the most interesting aspects of the seemingly global "gamer culture" that on different markets there are distinctive preferences for certain games or genres. This is already shown by a quick look the national selling charts. The authors of this volume, however, tend to writing on western – mostly US-American – examples of games and players, even well-known Asian productions, like e. g. the "Final Fantasy"-series, being mentioned only in passing.

But apart from this the reader will find a comprehensive view by a total of 27 articles of almost constantly high quality and in most cases provided with voluminous references. Of the six sections, for our subject most of all the paragraphs on "Games as a Cultural Phenomenon" and "Games as a Social Phenomenon" are of interest. Here we find e. g. contributions by Sherry Tuckle on questions of identity as well as articles on the representation of gender, ethnicity, and history. The contribution by Anna Everett ("Serious Play: Playing with Race in Contemporary Gaming Culture") is a fine example of which moral problems become obvious here, the range being from criticism and the kind of criticism of computer games in the mass media as far as to the question of valuating public domain-software, which indeed may also be used for producing racist contents.

Also the question of the effect of the media is dealt with in detail: besides the good overview-contribution by Jeffrey Goldstein on "Violent Video Games", at once a number of other articles on cognitive and psychological effects is offered, the article on the therapeutical value of computer games being slightly over-optimistic in my opinion.

Altogether, the variety and quality of the material as well as the high-quality fittings justify the purchase of this volume which as far as I know is without alternative. Who is already familiar with the works of the single authors, however, should not expect great new insights.