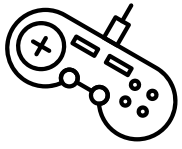


As of the 2023/2024 school year, two video games have finally been included in the secondary school Polish language curriculum: *This War of Mine* and *Cyphers Game*. Although both titles are only on the supplementary reading list, it is still an important step towards fully appreciating video games as a cultural product that can be used in the teaching process.

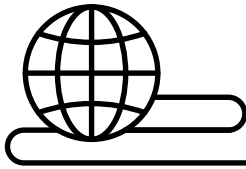




VIDEO GAMES

CREATIVE SPACE
AND LEARNING AID





Game studies – understood as a research field rather than as a discipline – have been developing for over 30 years

This War of Mine is a game inspired by the siege of Sarajevo during the Balkan war in the 1990s and released in 2014 by Poland's 11 bit studios. The player takes on the role of a resident in the city of Pogoren and must make morally difficult choices to find shelter, food, and medicine. On the other hand, *Cyphers Game* is a 2022 gaming project by the Institute of National Remembrance about the 1920 Polish-Bolshevik war and the significance of the work carried out by Polish cryptologists for the ultimate victory – in this case, the player can take on the role of real Polish soldiers from that period, activate a communication device of the time, break the enemy cypher and consequently destroy the Bolshevik armoured train.

'It's great that the people involved in education have recognised that games are a part of culture and that video game specialists should be invited to cooperate: noteworthy is the fact that Joanna Pigulak, PhD and Marcin Pigulak, PhD from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań prepared an excellent information brochure on how to teach *This War of Mine*', says Michał Kłosiński, PhD, DLitt, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Silesia and Director of the Game Studies Research Centre of the University of Silesia. 'However, teacher training within a variety of fields still lacks classes devoted to game culture and there is still no textbook explaining how to teach games. This means that the legislator is shifting the responsibility for further training in this area onto teachers who are already burdened with many additional tasks. We need systemic solutions that support not only the teachers of Polish language but also history, geography, and biology, among others.

Why have video games (i.e. computer, console, and mobile games) been overlooked for so long and treated by part of society as a 'dark current in culture'? According to Prof. Michał Kłosiński, their status as an inferior cultural object is due to games falling prey to pre-judgement. Such thought did not come from nowhere: the belief that video games are a threat originates from their presence in disreputable spaces – casino gaming rooms that

assumed a certain amount of gambling, monetary loss, potential addiction, and contact with activities meant only for adults, such as smoking. In addition, people with right-wing sensibilities, especially in the United States, regarded video games as, so to speak, training grounds for murderers – every time there was a tragic shooting in an American school, the real culprit was already known. 'Computer games became the scapegoat responsible for everything, and not at all the American weapon culture, their accessibility, and fetishisation', Prof. Kłosiński says ironically, adding that at the same time the systemic exclusion of hardcore gamers created the image of game enthusiasts as white, heterosexual, misogynistic men who celebrate certain cultural divisions, for example with regard to gender, as a consequence of which some parts of the gaming community are considered to be degenerate. We should not forget that, based on medical, psychological, and sociological research results, gaming disorder has been recognised as a genuine illness and is included in ICD-11 (drawn up by the World Health Organisation) and DSM-5 (published by the American Psychiatric Association). In spite of all these worrying aspects, games are certainly worth pursuing scientifically, and game studies – understood as a research field rather than as a discipline – have been developing for over 30 years. As Prof. Michał Kłosiński argues, a scientific reflection on games allows us to 'disenchant' them.

'Even with gaming addiction as a starting point, we are already able to see how large of an impact video games have on human biology. Much larger, as it turns out, than literature, cinema, or comic books! Video games allow us to study humans a little differently than the media we are familiar with, they show us how many aspects of human engagement with a cultural object we can access by playing games', argues the Director of the Game Studies Research Centre.

Video games are also the fastest growing market for cultural and artistic consumption in the world – we play them on our phones, computers, consoles, and increasingly TV sets. In a sense, games dominate our culture; after all, we are all witnessing the transition from written culture (with literature being its most important manifestation) to digital culture (created through internet and social media).

Unfortunately, games can also be used to ideologise play, which is, as Johan Huizinga said, at the core of all human action and, therefore, also at the foundation of culture creation. This is why gaming studies seek to investigate, for example, how systems of corporate control are built, how game interfaces and mechanisms make their way into the everyday management of our time and lives – e.g. the loyalty programmes for collecting points in shops and gas stations, and point systems in education.

‘We need to study games in order to more effectively counter ideologies that use them to manipulate behaviour and expose us to the mental, cognitive, financial, and social game exploitation. In the latter case, they take advantage of our sensibility, our need for contact with other people, and our need to get immersed in other worlds’, states Prof. Michał Kłosiński.


This is because games offer us other worlds, alternative to our reality. We can take advantage of this offer in two ways: we can choose the negative, escapist path – and escape from reality. We can also choose the positive, utopian path – and treat game worlds as a space to seek alternatives that reinvigorate our desire for change, which may translate into political, social, or economic action, and ultimately a change in the *status quo*. And it is precisely this approach to games that creates a multitude of opportunities for their use in school education: designing social spaces, engaging young people in thinking about climate issues (through the so-called green gaming), asking fundamental questions about human existence, our relationship with the environment, relationships with other people, reconstruction of history, reflection on the future state of society, analysis of our engagement with natural resources, and reflection on


how new types of socialisation and society are created through games.

‘Video games give us the opportunity to test different solutions in virtual reality that is safe and yet responsive to what is happening in the real world. At the height of the migration crisis, mobile games were created about people fleeing war zones, such as *Bury Me, My Love*, and during the women’s marches, a game called *Fantastic Fetus* was released in which we care for a fetus (spoiler alert: the fetus dies after birth)’, enumerates the USil researcher, adding that nowadays children and young people are exposed to history mainly through such games as *World of Tanks*, *World of Warships*, and *Assasin's Creed* – and it was the 3D models of Notre Dame Cathedral from the latter game that proved to be the most reliable sources when the famous building needed to be rebuilt after the fire in 2019!

The stimulation of creative thinking is yet another benefit of games worth mentioning.

‘Let’s show that games are a creative space! Not everyone has to be a gamer, but let’s encourage students to create their own games, such as board games, for example. In general, I don’t think we should assign video games as homework, but rather ask what young people like to play. I’m interested in what excites young people today. What gets them going, colloquially speaking. We shouldn’t reduce the contribution of games in education only to their history, or create a digital version of Polish martyrdom’, argues Prof. Michał Kłosiński. ‘Let’s ask which games young people like to play and what kinds of games they would like to create to express themselves – let us be carried away by their creativity. The Director of the Game Studies Research Centre is also a member of the GETES initiative dealing with certification and dissemination of knowledge about VR simulators in education: thanks to the introduction of simulators in schools, vocational skills training, which takes three or four years these days, could be significantly shortened. This is yet another area as part of which the development of the game industry can have a significant impact on school education.

 Tomasz Płosa

 Michał Kłosiński, PhD, DLitt, Associate Professor
Institute of Literary Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Silesia
USil Game Studies Research Centre
michal.klosinski@us.edu.pl

