

## Review:

## Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion

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## Abstract

*The edited volume Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion (2017) by Vít Šisler, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, and Xenia Zeiler takes the study of religion and video games seriously and recognizes the widespread usage of religious themes in the world of games. The book can be read as an exposé of the state of research in the field of Game Studies with the specific focus on methods for researching how religion is represented in games and how religious traditions change and serves as inspiration for religious practices and beliefs.*

## Keywords

*method, video games, game studies, computer games*

**Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion** (Routledge Studies in Religion and Digital Culture, 2017), edited by Vít Šisler, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, and Xenia Zeiler. New York: Routledge. 242 p.

The gaming industry has undergone an extensive development since the early 1970s when the first computer games was introduced. The industry is no longer a fringe past time activity for a small young consumer segment. The global gaming market is set to reach US\$256.97 billion by 2025. More than 2.5 billion people worldwide play games. With the arrival of mobile gaming and improvements to hardware as well as video game streaming services gaming has become a viable form of entertainment for players from all backgrounds and ages. With the outbreak of COVID-19 gamers in the United States reported that they spent 45 percent more time playing video games amid the quarantine than before the pandemic (Mordor Intelligence 2020). Most certainly the field of Game Studies will only increase in importance over the coming years. Any gamer (casual as well as a pro) will notice – that in the contemporary post-secular society – many video games *are saturated with religious semiotics, for example, Fall out 3 (Hinduism), BioShock Infinite (Christianity) and the Assassin's Creed franchise (Islam, Christianity and Old Norse religion)* just to name a few.

The edited volume *Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion* (2017) by Vít Šisler, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, and Xenia Zeiler takes the study of religion and video games seriously and recognizes the widespread usage of religious themes in the world of games. The book can be read as an exposé of the state of research in the field of Game Studies with the specific focus on methods for researching how religion is represented in games and how religious traditions change and serves as inspiration for religious practices and beliefs.

The book is divided into four parts *Textual and Audiovisual Narratives, In-Game Performance, Production and Design, and Interactivity and Rule System*. Each of the book's 12 chapters (excluding the Introduction and the final Critical Reflection) examines a particular method for the study of religion in relation to video games. All chapters follow the same structure and do a good job of giving an overview of the method presented and the exciting research. The case studies presented throughout the chapters of the book are rich and serves as welcomed breaks in between, sometimes, dense theoretical and methodological considerations. The author of this review especially enjoyed Gregory Price Grieve's ethnographic approach to the study of Zen Buddhism among the residents in the virtual world of *Second Life* engaging. It is both thought-provoking and interesting to see how ethnographical research methods has moved into the virtual realms.

However, it must be noted that the ambition of the volume is to go beyond media-centered investigations and examinations of religious themes in games. The editors also want to include "the technical environment of video games and gamers as well as the cultural environments of video games and gaming into consideration" (p. 7).

One such example is the stimulating chapter *Mobile Gaming for Learning Jewish – History, Tikkun Olam, and Civics* by Owen Gottlieb. The contribution investigates how Design-Based Research methods can be used in the study of video games, religious literacy, and learning. The chapter discusses the Augmented Reality Game (ARG) *Jewish Time Jump: New York* and the central question for Owen is "How can mobile history ARGs better provide

a best-case, fair hearing for opposing perspectives?” (p. 83). The outcome of the case study showed that by using a video game learners in civic education better demonstrated the ability to articulate a differing perspective concerning religion.

All in all, *Methods for Studying Video Games and Religion* is an appreciated contribution to the field of Game Studies. The editors have done an important job putting together this volume and if anyone doubted the seriousness of Games Studies and the field’s methodological awareness and ambitions, they will be proven wrong. The book is sometimes dense when it comes to methodological deliberations but then again, the book is about precisely that. It should also be noted that the uniform structure of the book as well as the love for the subject displayed by the contributors makes it easier to follow the text. I would recommend the book to anyone interested in religion and video games. As well, as people who have a general interest in methodological issues within the humanities and social sciences. This since the field of Game Studies most likely will have a much larger impact on research at large in a near future, both when it comes to empirical, theoretical, and methodological concerns.

## References

Mordor Intelligence. 2020. “Gaming market – growth, trends, forecasts (2020–2025).” *Mordor Intelligence* website. Accessed [November 30, 2020], <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/global-games-market>.