In August 2014, Zoë Quinn, an independent games designer, released a browser game designed to illustrate the difficulties of navigating depression. Although the game met with critical success, Quinn began to receive hate mail, which intensified following the publication of a blog post from a former boyfriend that accused her of sleeping around to further her career. What can only be described as an online culture war erupted, mostly concentrated around the Twitter hashtag #Gamergate. While Gamergate ostensibly revolved around ethics in gaming and journalism, it included virulent online attacks on female games designers and journalists, some of whom were driven out of the industry and out of their homes due to threats of rape and violence. The controversy both demonstrated and challenged the notion of “the gamer” and of gamer identity as young, white and male. *Coin-Operated Americans* was written just before Gamergate, but it provides a much-needed historical perspective on how and why adolescent masculinity occupies such a prominent position in the games industry, in gaming culture, and in the discourse that surrounds video games.

In contrast to much of the previous writing on videogame history, which focusses on the rise and fall of various technologies, *Coin-Operated Americans* does valuable work by situating the evolution of video games within a broader cultural, political and economic context in the US. Kocurek places video games at the centre of digital media culture, where they belong, and demonstrates how sets of beliefs and fears regarding digitization as a whole crystallized around video gaming. The book identifies the games arcade as a critical nexus point for the development of a culture that prizes competition, technological skill and consumer behaviours, and demonstrates how notions of American boyhood and masculinity came to be deeply imbricated within that culture. A photograph taken by Enrico Ferorelli for *Life* magazine in Ottumwa, Iowa in 1982 featuring top gamers of the time functions as a synecdoche throughout the book for the way in which male gamers were positioned by the arcade industry and by parts of the popular press in the 1980s – as young, healthy, sporty and social, and, above all, masters of technology. Kocurek argues for the arcade as a training ground for the development of a model of capitalism in the digital economy – an arena in which boys first encountered computers in a form that was both inviting and easy to master at a time when computing was becoming increasingly important in the marketplace. The idea that these gamers then went on to form a white-collar labour force that quickly adapted to new technologies is an evocative one, but one that would have been more convincing with some hard evidence to back it up.

The idealized archetype of the “technomasculine,” as Kocurek refers to it, developed to counter growing unease over arcade gaming, which Kocurek traces all the way back to the shared spaces and practices of exhibition between arcade games, pinball and peep shows. In the discourse voicing concern for disaffected youth, video gamers continue to be identified as young, white and male, but they are portrayed as antisocial and vulnerable to the insidious influence of violent games such
as the notorious *Death Race* (Exidy, 1976). The controversy over *Death Race* forms a case study within the book, which makes a useful contribution to understanding the significance of violent video games for the industry, as well as the way in which violent games dominate public discourse on gaming in general. The apparent contradiction between the figure of the gamer as a master of technology, or as a vulnerable youth subject to the corrupting influence of video gaming, is reconciled in the idea of violent technomasculinity. The book ultimately historicizes the persistent myth of “the gamer” as male, and goes a long way towards explaining the gender imbalances in the games industry.

This is an important book, and one that, thanks to Kocurek’s engaging style, will be accessible not only to those with specific research interests in video gaming, but also to those with broader interests in American culture and in notions of boyhood. The book provides insight into the ways in which gender imbalance developed in gaming culture, which, as Kocurek suggests, is a vital step towards addressing it. However, for all the complexities of Gamergate, it was very much about whose voices are heard in gaming culture and whose are silenced, and I couldn’t help but wonder about the anonymous girl gamers in some of the photographs of the arcades in this book. We need to hear their voices, their histories, too.

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