



School of Creative Media

香港城市大學
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**history
of games**

HISTORY OF GAMES

THE AGES OF GAMES.
EPOCHS AND PERIODISATIONS

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

FOR MORE INFO



25-27 JUNE 2026 - CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
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HISTORY OF GAMES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

2026

The Ages of Games

Epochs and Periodisations

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Welcome

On behalf of the programme committee, local organising committee, and conference chairs, welcome to the book of abstracts for the 2026 edition of the *History of Games International Conference*, which took place at City University of Hong Kong, 25–27 June 2026, with an online day on 2 July 2026. This volume collects the abstracts presented at the conference under the theme *The Ages of Games: Epochs and Periodisations*.

Our 2026 conference featured keynote addresses by Dr Akiko Sugawa-Shimada of Yokohama National University on *Women, Japanese History, and Videogames in Japan: Female Fans' Heritage Tourism as Game-adjacent Cultural Phenomena*. The talk examined how Japanese video games and their cross-media adaptations helped expand female participation in historically male-dominated gaming and history cultures. For day 2 of the conference Dr Paolo Pedercini from Carnegie Mellon University presented *A History of Video Games Through Mass Extinctions*. The keynote thereby offered a materialist history of videogames through industry crises and mass extinctions, arguing that each rupture reshaped what kinds of games, labour models, and cultural possibilities could survive under changing relations between capital, developers, and players.

History is often divided into epochs, be they ages, periods, dynasties or eras. The history of popular culture is no different: cinema, for example, has the cinema of attractions, the silent period, the age of vanguards, post-war movements such as the New Waves or the Italian Neorealism, the New Hollywood, the age of V-Cinema and OVA, and the international rise of independent films. Similarly, games and video games have Golden Ages, revolutions, generations, crashes, and many other popular ways to identify discrete segments of their own histories. To study the history of games is to think about epochs defined by shared traits and bookended by transformative events.

How is this periodisation done, and by whom? Who are the stakeholders of this conceptualisation? What are the main criteria to define periods? How does the concept of epochs differ between the spheres of academia, criticism, and popular gaming culture? Epochs can be proposed and accepted by the public according to technology, impact of/on other areas outside of the medium, and even artistic trends and movements. They often tell a unified story that is useful in simplifying the ebbs and flows of the history of the medium, but can hide key events, actors, and regions.

The open call for *History of Games 2026* invited considerations of what periodisation is in the context of game histories: for example, already established and accepted periods, alternative ones, problematisations of epochs or international and regional periods and their coexistence. What are the best ways to discuss gaming's epochs, and what methods can be used to anchor them? What can we learn (and unlearn) by questioning these ages of games?

Our peer-review process yielded 59 presentations from an international cohort of 65 research scholars, the abstracts of which can all be read in this volume. We are grateful to everyone who gathered in Hong Kong and online to make this year's edition of *History of Games* such a great success. The 2026 conference was our third consecutive yearly edition, and firmly locks in History of Games as an annual event going forward.

Please enjoy reading through this excellent selection of research texts from our 2026 conference presentations. The latest epoch of game history studies starts right here!

Sincerely,

The Programme Committee, Local Organising Committee, and Conference Presidents for *History of Games* 2026.

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Keynote Addresses

Women, Japanese History, and Videogames in Japan: Female Fans' Heritage Tourism as Game-adjacent Cultural Phenomena

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Abstract

In Japan, videogames have traditionally had a predominantly male user base, but the number of female users has been increasing since the early 2000s, when game consoles became more user-friendly. Notably, the videogame *Sengoku BASARA* (based on the history of the Warring States Period during the late fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries) and the girls' videogame *Hakuoki* (based on the history of the Bakumatsu Period, 1853-1868, particularly the shogunal guard unit Shinsengumi) became a massive hit, particularly among women. The content was consumed across various media platforms, including anime and stage plays, and the rise of "*rekijo*" (history fan girls) became a social phenomenon. Recent years have seen the mobile game *Touken Ranbu* (2015-) and its adaptations—including stage plays and anime—become massive hits. Because *Touken Ranbu* features handsome male characters who are personifications of historical Japanese swords, content tourism—where fans visit the birthplaces of historical figures associated with swords from the Heian (the 8th-12th century) to the Edo periods (the 17th -19th century)—has become a social phenomenon. This keynote will explore how female fans' consumption of game content and travel behaviors transformed the male-dominated field of games and history, shifting perceptions of women as consumers with significant economic impact.

About the Speaker

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, PhD, is a professor in the Graduate School of Urban Innovation at Yokohama National University, Japan. She is the author of a number of books and articles on anime, manga, and Cultural Studies, including *Girls and Magic* (2013), *2.5-dimensional Culture* (2021), *Introduction to 2.5D Studies* (2024), chapters in the books *Shojo Across Media* (2019), *Contents Tourism and Pop Culture Fandom* (2020), and *Animating the Spiritual* (2020), *Idology in Transcultural Perspective* (2021), *War as Entertainment and Contents Tourism in Japan* (2022), *Cultural Approaches to Studio Ghibli's Animation* (2022), and *Mechademia: Second Arc* vol. 15.2, "2.5D Culture," (guest editor, 2023). ORCID 0000-0002-9381-3718.



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A History of Video Games Through Mass Extinctions

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Abstract

This talk proposes a materialist periodization of video game history through moments of crisis, collapse, and "mass extinctions." Revisiting canonical turning points - including the crashes of 1977 and 1983, the decline of arcades, the publisher consolidation of the mid-1990s, and the rise of independent games - it asks not only what parts of the industry survived these ruptures, but what kinds of games, production models, and cultural possibilities disappeared or emerged as a result.

Drawing on the perspective of a game developer, this talk argues that these crises reflect shifting relationships between capital, developers, and players. It further examines the recent wave of layoffs and the challenges of independent game-making in a ruthless attention economy, suggesting that the current restructuring signals a broader deprofessionalization of game development. It concludes by speculating that the ongoing "Game Industry Reset" may mark the end of a consolidated era for the Western game industry, which raises new questions about the future of games as cultural production beyond the imperatives of profitability.

About the Speaker

Paolo Pedercini's work deals with the relationship between electronic entertainment and ideology. He often works under the project name "molleindustria" producing video games addressing various social issues such as environmentalism, food politics, labor and urbanism. His games are enjoyed by millions of non-art oriented people over the net and have been exhibited in art and non-art contexts all over the world.

Paolo teaches media production and experimental game design at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and has lectured extensively in venues ranging from the oldest squat in Italy to the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Paolo's work has received wide international coverage by major media including The Guardian, El Pais, BBC, Liberation, Der Standard, New York Times, Washington Post, Business Week, Playboy Brazil, ARTE' TV, Wired, Vice among the others.

Paolo is the director of LIKELIKE, a arcade/gallery devoted to independent games and playful art in Pittsburgh, PA.



Links

molleindustria.org/HistoryOfGames

art.cmu.edu/people/paolo-pedercini

paolo.molleindustria.org

likelike.org

bsky.app/profile/molleindustria.org

Abstracts

A Counter Narrative of Failure: Ecofilmes, the SEGA Saturn, and Local Platform Success in Portugal (1995–1998)

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Keywords: *Game studies, SEGA Saturn, Platform studies, Distribution, Portugal*

Abstract

Frequently described in international historiography as a commercial and strategic failure outside Japan, the SEGA Saturn is commonly regarded as a failed console (Kent, 2001; Forster, 2011; Street, 2013). Such accounts, grounded mainly in North American and specific Western European market data, present the platform as technologically complex, poorly supported by third party developers, without a definitive “killer app” and rapidly eclipsed by competing systems. However, the Portuguese market presents a significant exception to this narrative. Between 1995 and 1998, the SEGA Saturn emerged as a substantial home console in Portugal, even amid fierce local competition from Sony and Nintendo systems. It was supported by strong media visibility, competitive community engagement, and a distributor-led ecosystem orchestrated by local distributor (Ecofilmes) under the “SEGA Portugal” brand.

Drawing on a historical cultural methodology that integrates archival research, media archaeology, and oral history (Guins, 2014; Swalwell, 207; Nicoll & Keogh, 2019), this investigation reconstructs a localised platform ecosystem through printed media, distributor catalogues, advertising materials, and participant testimonies. Informed by platform studies, cultural economy, and European games studies approaches (Bogost & Montfort, 2009; Nicoll, 2019; Navarro-Remesal, Pérez-Latorre, 2022), the analysis treats success not as a function of global sales figures or technological superiority, but as a historically contingent outcome shaped by distribution strategies, media ecologies, and cultural infrastructure.

This Portuguese case study challenges dominant global narratives of failure by demonstrating that platform performance must be understood through local mediation, visibility, and institutional support rather than through hardware determinism or corporate dominant narratives. It also defies narratives that focus only on technological centre issues to explain the console’s decline. Incorporating localised platform histories into game studies enriches understanding of how video game cultures emerge, persist, and dissolve. By foregrounding cultural circulation and infrastructural conditions, this investigation contributes to platform history and game studies debates concerning regional/local markets, media systems, and the situated nature of technological success.

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The NES and the Plaza Accord: Nintendo's North American Expansion amid 1980s U.S.-Japan Economic Power Shift

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Keywords: *Game studies, Nintendo, NES, Plaza Accord, Political economy, Platform studies*

Abstract

Dominant accounts in game studies have attributed the NES's North American success primarily to platform governance and technological factors, including software quality and post-crash market regulation (Kent, 2001; Forster; 2011; Sloan, 2011). However, these interpretations remain incomplete without considering broader political and economic conditions shaped by events such as the 1985 Plaza Accord (Frankel, 2016). Drawing on qualitative historical analysis and political economy (Mosco, 2009; Wallerstein, 2004, Frankel, 2016), alongside platform studies (Bogost & Montfort, 2009; Zagal & Edwards, 2024) and cultural history (Muriel & Crawford, 2018), this article situates Nintendo's North American expansion within Japan's postwar "economic miracle" (Henshall, 2017) and the techno-economic anxieties shaping US–Japan relations in the 1980s. It argues that the Plaza Accord's currency realignment, combined with Nintendo's domestic success with the Famicom, helped create the financial conditions enabling a nationwide US release of the NES. Therefore it presents alternative arguments that the success of the NES in North America cannot be fully accounted for through analyses of platform design and governance in isolation. By situating Nintendo's expansion within the geopolitical and monetary realignments of the mid-1980s, this article demonstrates how video game platforms are embedded within global systems of capital, trade, and state policy. By integrating geopolitical and economic analysis into platform history, the article contributes to debates in game studies concerning technological determinism, global circulation, and the structural forces shaping the videogame industry.

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Escapism, Touristic Gazes, and the "Tropical Beach Aesthetic" of Sixth Generation Console Games

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Keywords: *Water, Nostalgia, Escapism, Travel writing, Space*

Abstract

The history of the home video game console market is often periodized into generations defined by their technological advancements and commercial availability (Schweitzer 2021). This paper examines the wave of early 2000s video games that took advantage of technologies introduced in sixth generation consoles (1998-2004) to simulate water by heavily featuring tropical beaches and island settings. While this has not been widely discussed in Game Studies scholarship, fan communities regard this period with reflective nostalgia (Boym 2001) as the era of the “tropical beach aesthetic” (see: dabigweeb 2025). Game journalists have remarked that this aesthetic emerged due to the increased capabilities of new technologies introduced with the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube (Linneman 2018). However, nothing about these technologies necessitates using them to model water in tropical environments, as demonstrated by the swamps and temperate coasts of Vvardenfell in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (2002). This paper suggests that this era of tropical beach games must be understood in a broader cultural framework of the colonial imaginary. Drawing from developer materials and close readings of games, it argues that the flagship console games of this era like *Halo: Combat Evolved* (2001) and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (2002) which center tropical island environments in their gameplay and marketing should be understood as the result of technological capacities and limitations aligning with the prevailing cultural appetite for a more immersive tropical escapist fantasy.

Although advances were made in digital water in the late 1990s with games like *Wave Race 64* (1996) and *Wetrix* (1998), these titles generally did not simulate large, open environments that offered detailed escapist fantasies. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that it is human to seek to escape from society and into nature, but that “what we wish to escape to is not ‘nature’, but an alluring conception of it” that is “delineated and endowed with value” by culture (Tuan 1998, p. 12). This understanding is used here to explain why game worlds like Isle Delfino from *Super Mario Sunshine* (2002) can populate a Mediterraneanist environment (Tedesco 2018) with stereotyped Polynesian villagers; the gameplay enables a touristic gaze embodied in a “carnival of middle class obsessions” (van Nuenen 2024, p. 23), like Isle Delfino’s images of Italy and the South Pacific. Drawing on the work of Tom van Nuenen (2022, 2024) that argues gameplay affords players a form of travel writing, this paper situates early 2000s tropical aesthetic games produced in Japan and the United States within imperialism’s meaning-making power (Pratt 2008). It hopes that these conclusions about the necessary interconnectedness of cultural tastes, technology, and power will prove useful to others studying trends in digital games at the intersection of technical

capabilities and Cultural Studies or from postcolonial perspectives, as well as regional Game Studies work on those places that have been incorporated into the kit of cultural references subsumed by these dreams of escaping to tropical environments.

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The Epoch of LAN Parties: Origin, Development, and Periodisation of the LAN Scene in Germany, 1993–2005

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Keywords: *LAN scene, Subculture, Germany, Digital games, LAN party*

Abstract

As problematic as it is in history to divide eras, this process is necessary to provide a framework for scientific work. However, hardly any break or turning point has a comprehensive spatial, political, economic and social impact. Breaks usually make sense from a certain historical perspective, and this also applies to the history of games. Well-known periodisations such as the 'Golden Age of Arcade Video Games' or console generations are based on technical criteria. However, I would like to discuss an alternative perspective that shifts the focus away from technical criteria and looks at the subcultures that have emerged around games, as this periodisation takes into account the players and the social impact of games. I would like to elaborate on this in my contribution by looking at the era of LAN parties in Germany.

The term 'LAN party' means playing games together on one's own computers in a local area network (LAN) over several days and nights. From 1993 to 2005, LAN parties shaped the spaces, practices, and identities of young people in Germany. My findings are based on digital sources, media reports, private archives, and interviews with contemporary witnesses.

Four factors contributed to the emergence of LAN parties. Firstly, they evolved from other digital subcultures such as the demo scene, where computer parties had been taking place since the 1980s. Secondly, LAN parties originated from early forms of gaming communitarianism, such as playing together on consoles. Thirdly, it was made possible by technical advances in network technology. Null modem cables initially connected two computers. In the early 1990s, coaxial cables became widespread, allowing more than two computers to be networked locally for the first time. The networks set up in this way were prone to interference, but they were suitable for groups to play together. And fourthly, Doom was released in 1993, popularising gaming in a local network. LAN parties emerged.

Whereas the coaxial cables used previously had only connected smaller groups, this changed with the advancement of network technology in the late 1990s, when hubs, switches and servers became widespread. From then on, LAN parties could accommodate hundreds of participants. In addition to small, private LAN parties at home, there were now nationwide mass events with up to 3,450 participants. They became more professional and the hobby gave rise to its own subculture, the LAN scene, and its own LAN economy with organisers, technology providers, media, and sponsors.

Around 2005, online gaming experienced its breakthrough with the introduction of the gaming platform Steam in 2003, the release of World of Warcraft in Europe in 2005, and the widespread availability of affordable high-speed internet via DSL in Germany. Attending LAN parties became increasingly obsolete, marking the beginning of their decline.

This framing of the LAN party epoch is based on the practices of gamers rather than solely on technical criteria. Technical developments are still relevant, but they no longer mark clear turning points. The communitarisation and practices of gamers form the basis for this history of games.

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The Phenomenon of Retroisation of Contemporary Video Games Through the Lenses of Nostalgia

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Keywords: *Retroisation, Bauman, Nostalgia, Digital heritage*

Abstract

Zygmunt Bauman (2017/2018) has introduced the term *retrotopia* to talk about our turn toward the past, while we are still approaching the inevitable future, which we do not want to accept. This reflects our unfulfilled desires and longing for the ideal childhood and simulated memories (Juul, 2015) of things we might have even not experienced. A similar issue has also been raised by Mark Fisher (2014), who claimed that we strive to “cancel” our future. This paper presents my current PhD research project concerning retroisation of contemporary video games in reference to nostalgia and drawing upon the theories of thinkers like Bauman, Fisher, or Baudrillard (1981/1994). It also discusses the findings from my preliminary research, and the anticipated final form of the work to be done regarding the main part of the study, which is: voice-recorded and transcribed, individual in-depth interviews with a larger group of volunteers, and empirical game analyses of five titles [Terraria (2011), Stardew Valley (2016), Dead Cells (2018), Vampire Survivors (2022), and Songs of Conquest (2024)], selected by their popularity, community reviews, genre, and the presence of retro-style elements.

By placing player narratives, design strategies and institutional practices in dialogue with Bauman’s *retrotopia* (2017/2018) and distinct theoretical accounts of nostalgia (Davis, 1979; Boym, 2001; Fisher, 2014; Juul, 2015; Horváth, 2018), the paper argues that retro video games (Newman, 2013) function not only as commodities, but also as the tools for shaping our cultural identity (Davis, 1979). My preliminary empirical research consisted of six individual in-depth interviews, conducted with adult players, representing different gaming generations. The findings suggest that some players consciously choose pixelated, retro-styled productions over AAA titles, frequently describing technologically advanced games as lacking “atmosphere” or distinct identity. In contrast, retro-styled games are associated with simplicity, clarity of mechanics and a visible sense of authorial passion. This shows that retro elements (those that hark back to the first generations of video games) work not merely as stylistic markers but as indicators of perceived authenticity and design integrity of video games.

The number of copies of retro-styled games sold on digital distribution platforms such as Steam or GOG.com (Garda & Lewandowski, 2011) further demonstrate the cultural prominence of this phenomenon. Judging by the insights from the interviews, widely recognised titles, such as Vampire Survivors (2022), Stardew Valley (2016), or even Minecraft (2011), all must evoke players’ nostalgic feelings, taking them back to the times of the first video game consoles and computers, like NES, SNES, Amiga, and

many others. The notion of a “Nintendo generation” (Taylor & Whalen, 2008) further illustrates how specific platforms may become markers of generational, nostalgic identity (Davis, 1979; Pawelec, 2024). Institutionally, retroisation also manifests in museum exhibitions of 1970s-1990s game hardware and software (Mortensen & Kapper, 2015; Szewerniak, 2017; Reinhard 2018). Through preservation and exhibition practices, these institutions stabilise particular hardware cycles and titles as historically significant artifacts, contributing to a broader phenomenon of technostalgia (Mortensen & Kapper, 2015; van der Heijden, 2015; Bolin, 2016; Ciszek, 2024).

Last but not least, the increased popularity of custom video game consoles (like Anbernic or Entertainment System), capable of emulating titles from the earlier generations of video games that flood online marketplaces, such as Amazon, leads us to the topic of retro-nostalgia (Guffey, 2006; Ferenc-Stadnik et al., 2014; Brown, 2018; Brown, 2021) that yearns for things that merely pretend to reflect the past.

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Before Videogames Ecocriticism: A Preliminary Attempt at the Periodization of Videogames through Ecopolitics

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Keywords: *Climate change, Ecocriticism, Ecopolitics, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement*

Abstract

Videogames have been embedded in ecopolitics from their parallel development in the post-war period and mainstream emergence in the 1990s (Backe 2014). Considering ecocriticism's historical orientation (Buell 1995), including its 'waves' of developments in ecocriticism (López et al. 2024), the signification of games' historical embeddedness in ecopolitics can be extended. This paper conceptualizes a preliminary periodization of videogames through an ecopolitical lens, which informs how games ecocriticism can now assess those timeframes. The four eras of games' ecopolitics are the pre-ecopolitics; early ecopolitics; Kyoto Protocol; and Paris Agreement eras. By considering how games changed around those eras, a productive juxtaposition of videogames and ecopolitical histories can be cultivated.

The pre-ecopolitics phase (c. 1960-1983) concerns early histories of environmentalism and games. The 1960s-1970s constituted a Western "Golden Age of Environmental Law" (Klein 2015, 201-203), with many policies adopted. In games, this period saw a 'boom' (Donovan 2010) or even a 'Golden Age' (Eddy 2012), mainly because of the success of arcade games. The awkward transition from the arcade to home consoles inspired the infamous US-centered games market crash in 1983 (Montfort and Bogost 2009). Retrospectively, games of this era were simplistic, yet even text-based games such as *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976) have been analyzed as environmental texts (Chang 2011). The potential of computing and simulation for environmental understandings was also advanced, such as in the interdisciplinary interactive project *Ecogame* (1970) (Mason 2024).

The early ecopolitics era (c. 1983-1992) overlaps with most of Ronald Reagan's presidency and his acceleration of neoliberalism. Reagan politicized environmental policy, stymying its progression (Klein 2015, 203-205), and has since divided its advocacy between progressives and conservatives (Lakoff 2010). Games developed via the creative Commodore 64 computer (Juul 2024) or new consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System emphasized their increasingly expansive technical capacities for representation. Accordingly, environmental representation became more pronounced (Backe 2017), with console games like *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991). Linear environmental themes surfaced, as did more pronounced environmental simulation games such as *SimEarth* (1990).

The Kyoto Protocol era (c. 1992-2015) refers to 1992's first major UN Convention on climate change and its operationalization in 1997's Kyoto Protocol, making climate change a popular concern. Nonhuman-oriented game franchises, especially *Pokémon*,

capitalized on the image of environmental disequilibrium with global resonance (Balmford et al. 2002; Nakazawa 2019 [1997]). Subsequent developments in realistic 3D environments and spatial storytelling (Jenkins 2006) have facilitated ecocritiques, including critiques of games specifically catered to negotiating climate change (Brown 2014). Attendant aspects of ecopolitics could likewise be considered, such as GTA's social segregation (Murray 2005), or Civilization's colonial determination of land (Lammes 2009). Ecopolitics became pronounced in popular games, albeit still as a future or secondary concern.

The Paris Agreement era (2015-), following the Paris Climate Accords, made the climate crisis a present reality. Ecocritical game studies gained traction in its wake (Abraham and Jayemanne 2017). Games culture simultaneously dealt with the aftermath of the #GamerGate movement (Mortensen 2018). From a development perspective, the release of Unity 5 helped 'democratize' game design, leading to an influx of (eco-)games (Nicoll and Keogh 2019). Games ecocriticism overwhelmingly takes place within this era, with no shortage of examples combining sociopolitical and environmental concerns (Op de Beke et al. 2024), as well as ecocritiques of development (Prax et al. 2026).

While a more thorough account of ecopolitical and videogame histories is beyond the scope of this paper, the preliminary identification of periods facilitates further discussion concerning the mutual transformation of games and ecopolitics. It aims to provide ecocritical approaches to games with the necessary toolkit to situate their inevitably historical practice of ecocriticism within Earth's (climate-)changing contexts.

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The Long Climate Crisis Event: On the Periodization of MapleStory Before and After the Big Bang Update

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Keywords: *MapleStory, Climate crisis, Eco-historical, Singular, Commercialization, Community*

Abstract

MapleStory's Big Bang update in 2010 fundamentally changed the game: the official trailer instructs players to "forget everything [they] know about MapleStory" (MapleStory 2010); players consider it as arguably the game's most influential update (coppersan 2021; wiji 2025); and the recently announced MapleStory Classic World promotes itself as a 'Pre-Big Bang' alternative (MapleStory Classic 2025). The Big Bang thus constitutes a cataclysmic event that signifies irreversible environmental change, implying a loss of the old 'Maple World' (Byers 2025). However, the post-Big Bang Maple World is characterized by the game's commercialization and loss of community derived from updates preceding and following the Big Bang. Juxtaposing the Big Bang with the climate crisis, this paper argues that MapleStory's post-Big Bang sensibility obscures the granularity of MapleStory's environmental changes. Employing autoethnographic historical game research (Webber and Wilde 2025) and player vlogs and popular journalism on MapleStory, the paper signifies how gradual historical changes complicate a singular understanding of environmental crisis.

The climate crisis presents a challenge to historical sensibility, as environmental and sociopolitical histories are no longer separable (Chakrabarty 2009). Instead, a historical perspective may identify a variety of ruptures, such as agricultural and industrial revolutions, which inform the present ecopolitical crisis (Yusoff 2018). Existing eco-historical scholarship therefore identifies the climate crisis not as a singular event, but as an amalgamation of different contextual factors. This eco-historical background can inform the periodization of MapleStory's Big Bang rupture. The game's systems underwent major changes: maps were condensed; level progression became far easier; User Interfaces were revised; and a new storyline starred an industrial cult resurrecting an evil mage who caused the Big Bang (MapleStory Wiki 2025). Eco-aesthetically, the Big Bang engendered a contested division between traditional and modern perceptions of the world (Cubitt 2014), evidenced by spatiotemporal condensation, quality of life improvements, and antagonistic industrialism.

Commercialization and community loss define post-Big Bang MapleStory. The post-Big Bang world is focused on quick leveling, and developer Nexon made purchasable time-savers and power-ups more impactful. However, none of these developments originated in the Big Bang update itself. The original pay-to-win updates preceded the Big Bang, such as the release of certain classes with skills and item upgrades locked behind a paywall (coppersan 2021), and post-Big Bang updates with aggressive

monetization have continued to proliferate to this day (Valentine 2023). Nexon's market strategies are experienced as offensive and exploitative to the extent that player communities have taken to the streets to voice their resistance against their game's aggressive commercialization (Park et al. 2023).

Likewise, MapleStory's sense of community is perceived as a pre-Big Bang phenomenon that was lost since. The slow progression in pre-Big Bang MapleStory is not just a 'slow' aesthetics (Rauch 2018; Navarro-Remesal 2026). It also invites a community-oriented lifestyle. Because pre-Big Bang leveling was slow, players relied on cooperative 'Party Quests' to progress, with party play becoming an end in itself, as players logged in looking for social experiences. For some, MapleStory primarily served this social function, leading to intimate relationships built through the game (Huynh et al. 2013). Nowadays, the game is practically single-player, with even Party Quests no longer requiring cooperation. However, the Big Bang did not solidify this, with party play areas increasing after the update and only gradually disappearing (coppersan 2021).

Whereas the Big Bang aesthetically represents a singular climate crisis event that changes the foundations of a familiar world, the association of aggressive commercialization and community loss, both attendant aspects of the post-climate change world, with the update, signify a tendency to singularize history, while an interlayered contextual approach is more robust for understanding the nuances of eco-historical developments.

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The history of independent video games in Asia

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Keywords: *Independent Video Game, History, Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia*

Abstract

This paper examines the history of independent video games in Asia, focusing on the key historical factors that have shaped the trajectory of independent game development across various time periods. In *Handmade Pixels: Independent Video Games and the Quest for Authenticity*, Juul (2019) conceptualizes the evolution of independent games as a historical movement driven by creativity, personal expression, and experimentation. He provides a selective account, dividing the history of independent video games into 5 stages: 1961-1998, 1998-2005, 2005-2012, 2012-2014, and 2015-2018. The paper builds on Juul's discussion of multiple dimensions of "independence" in relation to mainstream aesthetic, financial, and industry standards. By connecting to characteristics in various periods in the evolution of Asia's video game history, the paper investigates key events and new genres that emerge from the cultural references of independent game developers in East and Southeast Asia.

The paper relates to literature in Asian game studies, which emphasizes non-Western perspectives to present the region's unique realities in game development. This regional focus examines the periodisation that highlights game-making shaped by issues such as Asian national histories, alternative hardware systems, the politics of racial representation, and industry policy interventions (Chen, 2024; Chew, 2015; Kang et al., 2024; Phan, 2021). The paper presents voices and games crafted by Asian artists and creators to articulate an independent pathway that Keogh (2023) argues video games are not just about big companies but also filled with stories of small-scale creative teams operating on low budgets, using free tools, and driven by passion.

The paper divides the epoch of independent video games in Asia into three major historical stages: late 1990s -2010, 2011-2019, and 2020 to the present. The periodisation is tentative and requires further elaboration on the segmentation for each time period. The analysis is based on historiographic themes that emerged from the analysis of the large-scale fieldwork interviews with Asian video game developers conducted by the researcher across East and Southeast Asia. The first stage concerns creative ideas developed by independent game developers during a period of popular play culture amid rampant piracy. This stage lays the groundwork for new genres, for instance, wuxia and multiple-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs), to deliver independent game design. Representative titles that started the trend in East Asia include *Lineage* (1998), *Beijing Life* (2001), and *Chinese Paladin* (2010). The second stage of 2011-2019 focuses on emerging trends in development strategies that connect local game developers' personal cultural experiences to vernacular game content. This historical stage focuses on developer stories under various chapters of the Independent Game Developer Association (IGDA) in East and Southeast Asia. Selective titles and

game studios for analysis include Coconut Islands (China), Lemon Sky (Malaysia), Red Candle Games (Taiwan), Sanuk Games (Thailand), and Agate Studios (Indonesia). The section reports field observations that the researcher participated in game conventions in China and Singapore. It documents the hype of game-making that attracted a growing number of young developers in Asia. The third stage began in 2020 after the pandemic and continues to the present. One major outlook is the success of global titles such as *Black Myth: Wukong* (2024), *Where Winds Meet* (2025), and *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (2017, 2021), developed by Chinese and Korean indie game developers. The pathway of corporatization has further refined the implications of independent video games in this period, as the global independent game market continues to grow.

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Piracy and Periodization in Argentina

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Keywords: *Argentina, Piracy, Grey Markets, Peripheral Markets, Political Transitions, Distribution Infrastructures*

Abstract

When the history of video games is examined from outside the major production hubs, certain commonly accepted periodizations begin to fracture. This paper proposes a case study of Argentina to argue that local conditions (particularly piracy, access to tools, political regulation, and distribution infrastructures) reshaped and displaced the temporal boundaries commonly assumed in global video game historiography.

Before the consolidation of digital distribution and intensified globalization, Argentina experienced decades marked by a peculiar combination of coincidence and displacement in relation to dominant markets. Certain technological shifts occurred in rough synchrony with global trends, while others were significantly delayed, overlapped, or reconfigured. Central to this divergence was piracy: since the local economy made buying original games prohibitively expensive, piracy acted as a structuring axis of consumption. In other words, in Argentina the history of video games has been strongly dictated by what was easier to pirate. In the case of home consoles, the most accessible systems became the most culturally significant, regardless of their chronological position in dominant narratives. For example, the Family Computer ecosystem did not achieve widespread popularity until affordable hardware clones proliferated locally, almost seven years after the platform's initial release. This resulted in a longer and more pronounced coexistence of the 8-bit and 16-bit eras, rather than a clear succession. Similarly, the so-called 32-bit era only consolidated locally in the late 1990s, once large-scale piracy of the PlayStation became viable.

In addition to the lack of formal markets, political contexts offer an alternative axis for periodization distinct from technological succession. Along those lines, video game development in Argentina followed its own trajectory, likewise displaced from the major production centers. During the second half of the 1980s, a combination of widespread piracy and economic instability in the aftermath of the country's last military dictatorship (1976–1983) effectively extinguished any sustained attempt to commercialize games developed for home computers. It was not until the latter half of the following decade that the growing popularity of the PC as a gaming platform, together with the gradual emergence of local distributors acting as publishers for selected projects, enabled young developers—the first Argentine game studios—to see their creations circulate within a legal commercial circuit. And then everything was soon reshaped again by another political and economic rupture: the 2001–02 crisis, which tripled the value of the U.S. dollar in local terms and rendered the country

significantly more attractive to foreign investment, prompting what many locals consider the birth of the Argentine video game industry.

What happens to the concept of a “video game era” when examined from regions situated outside primary production centers? What becomes visible when piracy, grey markets, and import/export restrictions are treated as structuring forces rather than anomalies? By analyzing Argentina as a case study, this presentation suggests that global epochs are less universal stages than negotiated alignments shaped by local economic, political, and technological conditions... and that looking from the margins can sometimes clarify the center.

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Okay, I'll Bite: Periods of Videogame History as Told Through Vampire Games

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Abstract

The first appearance of vampires in videogames occurred in the late 1970s, and as a character type, they never quite died off, evolving alongside the medium. This paper does not aim to explore the enduring appeal of vampires (Wilson, 2024), as this would necessitate diversion into the broader popular cultures of film, animation, and literature (Auerbach, 1997; Groom, 2018). Instead, vampire character-types will be used here as a vehicle for the discussion of different periods of videogames, particularly through the lenses of different kinds of game affordances (Jayemane, 2012; Apperley and Parikka, 2018), game genres (Apperley, 2006; Arsenault, 2009; Clearwater, 2011; Vargas-Iglesias, 2020), and of permissible representational conventions from different points in time. By offering a consistent through-line across decades of game periodisation, the contribution of the work here is to consider the ways periodisation both is a recognisable set of categories, and is, by virtue of backwards and forwards referentiality (Backe, 2025) and rhizomatic growth (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), also not.

This paper will work with vampires as a character-type in a broad sense. They feature variously as main player characters, key antagonists, as generic NPCs, as referential points for genre (literary sense), whilst also breaking free of the gothic genre they came from. As such, Auerbach's point, "There is no such creature as "The Vampire"; there are only vampires," though made in relation to literature and film, still stands for games (Auerbach, 1997). Consequently, vampires are a useful tool for exploring the evolutions and shifts of game titles, the games industry, and the contexts games are made in.

The paper refers to *The Count*, originally dated to 1979, and representing one of the earliest videogames to feature a vampire theme (Adventure International, 1979). Based closely on the novel of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to mobilise people's existing frame of reference from the novel and adaptations, the initial TRS-80 release is rooted, as appropriate to its period, in text-based play. At this point in game history, the affective potential of games was reliant on written text and player understanding of the vocabulary input required to move the game forward (Fernández-Vara, 2014). Moving forward in time, the second case study for this paper is *Castlevania's* 1980-90's iterations, which as far as vampire games feature in Game Studies scholarship, are amongst the most discussed, due at least in part to the longevity of the franchise (Fernandez-Vara, 2010). Following this, representing the early 2000s console era, we suggest a comparison between the *Blade* movie tie-in game and *Bloodrayne 2*, as contrasting representations of male and female vampires, and the way in which these

games were contrastingly marketed in game magazines. For the 2010s, *Dark* (Realmforge Studios, 2013) and *Vampyr* (DONTNOD Entertainment, 2018) will be used as a point of comparison for the other cases. To conclude this reflection on periodisation, discussion of *Vampire Therapist* (2024) and *Suck Up* (2025) as innovations in the spectrum of vampire games will be discussed as notable departures from the periods of gaming highlighted earlier in the paper.

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Rethinking the Famiclone Era: Grey Markets and the Global South's First Age of Videogames

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Keywords: *Famiclone, Console, Periodisation, Grey markets, 8-Bit*

Abstract

During the 1980s and 1990s, a proliferation of low-cost, boot-leg Nintendo-compatible consoles—collectively known as famiclones—circulated across Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America (Zhang & Sun, 2026; Davies, 2023; Jian, 2024; Liao, 2016). Typically dismissed as illicit knockoffs and folded into narratives of “piracy” or “copy culture,” famiclones have rarely been treated as historically significant in their own right (Larson, 2020). This paper radically reassesses the “Famiclone Era” finding these devices not as marginal aberrations but as central artefacts and foundational infrastructures of global videogame culture.

For millions of players from Jakarta to Moscow, Shenzhen to Istanbul, famiclones were not secondary substitutes for an “authentic” console generation; they were the first encounter with electronic play (Larson, 2022; Davies, 2023). In many regions where official hardware distribution was limited, prohibitively expensive, or entangled in shifting post-socialist and postcolonial economies, grey-market famiclone consoles provided affordable access to interactive media (Binglin, 2024). In doing so, they profoundly democratised videogame participation (Liang, 2019).

While the combined global sales of the official Famicom/NES platform exceeded 60 million units (Nintendo, 2016), the so-called 8-bit era did not end with the advent of 16-bit or 3D systems. Instead, in many parts of the Global South, this famiclone console era extended, mutated, and coexisted alongside later technologies (Davies, 2023; Larson, 2022). Owing to the fragmented and unrecorded production networks of clone manufacturers, device numbers likely far surpassed official Nintendo consoles, particularly given the popularity of famiclones across large marketplaces, and their long afterlife with sales continuing today.

Beyond their affordable access across the Global South, famiclones also facilitated processes of vernacular adaptation. Popular Japanese and American titles were frequently modified to include local languages, bootleg translations, hybrid iconography, and regionally resonant aesthetics (Zhang & Sun, 2026; Zhang, 2013). However uneven or stereotyped, these modifications generated new forms of cultural visibility in electronic media. Rather than a one-way flow of Western or Japanese cultural dominance, the famiclone ecosystem produced iterative, locally embedded reinterpretations of global game texts.

Foregrounding the famiclone, this paper challenges dominant periodisations of game history structured around corporate narratives and Western markets, inviting a reconsideration of how epochs are defined, by whom, and for which audiences

(Trépanier-Jobin, 2021; Soriano, et al. 2019; Consalvo & Paul, 2019;; Mukherjee, 2017; Zhu & Shi, 2010). Drawing on grey media studies and global game historiography, this paper argues that the “Famiclone Era” may constitute an overlooked yet dominant age of videogame culture; an epoch anchored in informal economies, adaptive reuse, and infrastructural improvisation (Liang, 2019). Rethinking this era forces us to reconsider dominant histories of games and play, and to elevate the grey market not as peripheral, but as squarely central to the popularity and globalisation of videogames.

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Patching Time: Micro-Periodisation, the Metagame, and Nostalgia in Online Games

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Keywords: *Online Games, Esports, Patches, Overwatch Nostalgia*

Abstract

The history of patching in digital games begins not with software but with hardware. Early computing utilized physical patches — strips of tape placed over punch cards — to correct programming errors, a process that literally allowed new code to be written over old material. As computing shifted to digital storage, the patch evolved but retained its core purpose: the alteration of prior states to produce a new version. For the games industry, this evolution has had profound consequences for how games are experienced, historicized, and remembered.

Wendy Chun argues that as long as new patches and updates are being released, a program is alive — when updates cease, so does the life of the program (2016). For Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs), this logic is absolute. Always-on games cannot be reverted, paused, or archived in a prior state. As patches continuously transform the game, they simultaneously produce and erase discrete temporal eras — eras that player communities come to understand as historical epochs defined by shared strategies, play styles, and collective memory. James Newman has described digital games as "unstable objects," noting that the process of porting fundamentally alters the historical and temporal understanding of a game (2012, 2013). The patch functions similarly: each update overwrites the previous version, producing something new while leaving relics of what came before. As Carter argues, frequent content updates, bug fixes, and community influence render "the game" an unstable and dynamic object, one whose character is continuously renegotiated between developer and player.

This paper uses Blizzard Entertainment's *Overwatch* as a case study to examine how patch cycles generate discrete temporal eras — "metas" — that function as sites of nostalgia and community identity. Drawing on Salen and Zimmerman's definition of the metagame as encompassing player attitudes, play styles, and social contexts (Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 481), this paper argues that within *Overwatch*, the rotation of metas is directly managed through patch notes that nerf, buff, and rework playable heroes to reshape competitive viability and player behavior. Game Directors Jeff Kaplan's "developer diaries" (2013-2021), and Aaron Keller's "director's take" 2021-2026 framed these changes not merely as technical corrections but as acts of community management, negotiating between developer vision and player feedback.

From the 2017 "Mercy Meta" [MM] through to the infamous "GOATS" of 2019 to Dive Metas in 2022, and 2025 illustrates this dynamic. For MM following an overhaul of the support hero Mercy's abilities, she became a near-mandatory selection in competitive

play — an unintended consequence of what was designed as a nerf. Players experienced this not as a balance adjustment but as a recognizable era: one mourned or celebrated according to individual preference. The rotation of metas allows new players to rise through the ranks while simultaneously generating nostalgia for previous eras of gameplay. This paper argues that patch-driven meta cycles constitute a form of micro-periodisation — one that is player-felt, developer-managed, and historically significant, yet inherently ephemeral. Unlike hardware generations or publishing milestones, these eras exist only in community memory rather than stable artifacts. To study the history of online games is to study not their origins, but the perpetual cycles of their transformation.

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Periodizing the Spanish Video Game Industry: A Case Study in Alternative Video Game Histories

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Keywords: *Spain, History, Alternate, Video games*

Abstract

When studying the history of video games, it can be tempting to adopt a teleological view of the medium (Terrien, 2012), using successive hardware generations as the primary markers to separate different historical periods. However, studies of peripheral histories (Švelch, 2021) demonstrate that in markets distant from the main production centers (United States, Japan, the United Kingdom), alternative phenomena and dynamics emerge in which other factors play a significant role.

We locate the origins of the Spanish video game industry in the early 1970s, with the appearance of the Overkal (Mora, 2016) and the emergence of a nascent hardware-focused industry, which was affected only a few years later by the so-called Euro-crashes (Mora, 2024).

By the late 1970s, an ecosystem of arcade-focused studios had emerged (Torres, 2022), from which the first commercial video games were produced —Destroyer (CIDELSA, 1980)—. This sector's development was affected under the influence of a law popularly known as the Rosonazo (Medà, 2020), which limited the number of arcade machines permitted in bars. In parallel, the 1980s witnessed the so called Golden Age of Spanish software, a period linked to 8-bit microcomputers that produced the first industrial network of studios. These companies were able to compete with major European releases in the Spanish market (Fernández & Relinque, 2015) and, in some cases, export their titles abroad. The economic crisis in Spain in 1993, together with other structural problems, marked the end of this period.

During the 1990s, the industry became PC centric. New studios emerged with financial support from publishing groups and local distributors. This period saw the creation of the first major Spanish franchises —PC Fútbol (Dinamic Multimedia, 1993)— as well as the first major international commercial successes —Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines (Pyro Studios, 1998)—. The dot-com bubble burst brought this period to a close, marked by Dinamic Multimedia and Rebel Act Studios shut down in 2001.

This situation led to a dispersion of talent and the founding of new studios. During the first fifteen years of the 21st century, the industry diversified: studios focused on AAA development, mobile games, handheld consoles, and even social networks were founded. Unlike other countries, where the economic crisis of 2008–2011 led to studio closures (Banks & Keogh, 2021), we do not observe a comparable impact on the Spanish industry until several years later, between 2015 and 2017, when the popularization of Steam and shifts in business models resulted in the collapse of studios founded in the mid-90s.

These closures fall within a period associated with the crisis of digital distribution. From the early 2010s onward, numerous independent studios emerged, some of which achieved critical and commercial success and received international awards, including *Gris* (Nomada Studio, 2017), *Blasphemous* (The Game Kitchen, 2017), and *Moonlighter* (Digital Sun, 2018). These same studios are currently experiencing a post-COVID-19 crisis, whose long-term impact remains uncertain.

For this reason, we propose a periodization of the Spanish video game industry that takes into account not only hardware generations but also local and global economic crises, transformations in video game business models, and the impact of legislation.

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The regional genre that never was: the case of the Spanish videoaventura

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Keywords: *Genres, Regional, History, Spain*

Abstract

The categorization of cultural works has been a constant throughout history and genre is a key component of that. Video game genres are established on the basis of evolution (Arsenault, 2009), with new terms proposed around those perceived evolutions. As a result “the study of etymology appears to be an essential tool” for game history scholars to understand or defuse popular discourses (Therrien, 2015). Also, the local nature of some of these evolutionary offshoots makes it crucial to keep a regional perspective (Liboriussen and Martin, 2016). In this presentation, we analyze one of these regional genres, that of the Spanish “videoaventura”, and how it bridged two periods and different genres.

In 1984, the first issue of *Microhobby* was published in Spain, a weekly magazine focused on the ZX Spectrum, the most popular 8-bit microcomputer in the country (Esteve, 2012). *Microhobby* laid the groundwork for and introduced a new category for a type of game that was gaining popularity during those years: the videoaventura (Nieto, 1985).

According to *Microhobby*, videoaventuras were situated midway between text adventures and arcade games. The magazine argued that this genre had emerged thanks to technological advances that enabled new releases to incorporate a narrative dimension comparable to titles such as *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Crowther, 1976), while also featuring graphics on par with those of games by *Ultimate Play the Game*. A third defining element was added: gameplay centered on collecting a series of objects distributed throughout the map in order to solve a final enigma. *Microhobby* cited examples such as *Avalon* (Hewson Consultants, 1984), identified as the first example of the genre, *Sabre Wulf* (*Ultimate Play the Game*, 1984), *Underwulde* (*Ultimate Play the Game*, 1984), *Knight Lore* (*Ultimate Play the Game*, 1984), and *Pyjamarama* (Hinsley, 1984). No equivalent category appears to have existed in other national contexts. However, a review of game repositories from that decade reveals that the label “Arcade Game: Adventure” often encompasses the same titles.

The Spanish specialized game press adopted *Microhobby*’s categorization and consistently employed the term to describe games released throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In Spain, the dominance of microcomputers extended the life of text adventures, and graphic adventures only reached the country in the mid-90s. Hence, hybrid games such as *Labyrinth: The Computer Game* (LucasFilm Games, 1986) had a limited impact. Although the term “graphic adventure” was applied since the genre reached the country, the vague term “videoaventura” was also transferred to them and

used to describe them as late as 2001, creating a continuity that did not exist elsewhere.

For Spanish players, videoaventuras crystallized an aesthetic and a gameplay under its own unity, referring to games that were not made under that concept. It also, later, resulted in a wrong genealogy that misexplained the origin of a new popular genre, graphic adventures. This phenomenon illustrates the significant role played by the video game press in shaping genre classifications, discourses, and genealogies, as well as its capacity to influence players' interpretative frameworks of game evolution and periods.

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From Atari's Superman to Rocksteady's Batman: The Four Periods of Superhero Video Games

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Keywords: *Superheroes, Video game genres, Transmedia, Remediation, Periodisation*

Abstract

Since the late 1970s, publishers of superhero comics from the U.S. have had their intellectual properties transmediated into video games, with different approaches to their branding and remediation of the superhero narrative into gameplay. Just as superhero comics have been subject to many periodisations in critical, fan, and academic environments (Gavaler 2017), this paper proposes a periodisation of the superhero video game, treating it as a thematic genre.

The study has two interrelated strands of analysis. The first is through the lens of transmedia studies, considering the history of corporate decisions and licensing, and the narrative and artistic transmedia strategies employed, drawing from scholarship on the subject (e.g. Uricchio & Pearson 1991, Kinder 1991, Meehan 1991, Jenkins 2006, Wilson 2021). Particularly useful for this paper is Fleury's use of the concepts of megatext, supertext, and text (2020). The other strand of analysis is on video game genre and gameplay mechanics, with focus on the remediation (Bolter & Grusin 1999) of superhero fictions from other mediums into video games and the processes of avatarisation (Navarro-Remesal 2013) in superhero video games, which result in different degrees of fidelity to these characters' fictional worlds and individualities.

This paper proposes four distinct periods, each kickstarted by the release of paradigmatic video games. The First Period begins in 1979 with Atari's *Superman*, the first licensed superhero video game and one of the first action-adventure games. It is a period characterised by experimentation in the action and adventure genres, while the first attempts of transmedia storytelling across comics and video games are made. The Second Period starts in 1989 with the Turtlemania and Batmania phenomena, which brought about video game tie-ins to the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cartoon and the first *Batman* film directed by Tim Burton. What characterises this period is the dominance of the broader action genre and the transmedia reliance on film and TV, generally pushing aside the comics source material. The Third Period begins at the end of 1997 and 1998, when the 3D action-adventure genre becomes the main experimenting ground for American superheroes, with titles like *Spawn: The Eternal* (Sony, 1997) and *Batman & Robin* (Acclaim, 1998), while transmedia strategies begin to change, slowly backing away from film and TV tie-ins. The Fourth Period begins with the release of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady, 2009). Hailed by critics as the best superhero video game ever at the time, it became the template on which superhero video games have been produced since, as it accomplished mainly two things. Firstly, it perfected a balance between gameplay and story that suited superhero fiction, with game mechanics that were designed for its specific storyworld and character. Secondly,

it did not tie into any single previous incarnation of the character, drawing instead from what Fleury calls the megatext of Batman to create its own supertext sub-franchise, a unique version of the Batman mythos.

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Story by System: A Technical Periodisation of Video Game History Through Narrative Implementation Architectures

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Keywords: *Video game history, Narrative implementation, Technical periodisation*

Abstract

Story by System: A Technical Periodisation of Video Game History Through Narrative Implementation Architectures

This paper proposes a technical periodisation of video game history based on the evolution of narrative implementation architectures. While some existing historiographies privilege hardware generations (Kent, 2001; Harris, 2014), this research argues that the ways in which video games convey narrative to users are intrinsically shaped by the technological framework through which that narrative is implemented. The technical conditions of implementation (comprising data structures, scripting systems, engines, and production pipelines) define not only the formal possibilities of narrative delivery, but also its structural limits. Technology, in this sense, operates as a dynamic milieu: it sets boundaries while simultaneously offering points of negotiation, reinterpretation, and even rupture, potentially inaugurating a new paradigm in narrative transmission.

The selection of four narrative elements (cutscenes and cinematics, puzzles, dialogue, and quests) derives from their consistent identification as gameplay implementations across narrative design manuals (Lebowitz & Klug, 2012; Heussner et al., 2023), while the periodisation framework identifies five epochs based on the history of games and platform studies literature (Nitsche, 2008; Montfort & Bogost, 2009; Donovan, 2010; Wolf, 2012; Gregory, 2018; Nicoll, 2025; Sotamaa & Svelch, 2025): Microprocessors and ROM (1970s–mid-1980s), Mass storage and early operating systems (late 1980s–mid-1990s), Hardware-accelerated 3D (mid-1990s–mid-2000s), Middleware engines and data-oriented architectures (mid-2000s–mid-2010s), and Cloud computing with live-service models (mid-2010s–present).

The methodology examines each element through three dimensions: its functional definition within a given era, its technical implementation, and its representative games. This tripartite framework shows how technical constraints and affordances shape not only the kinds of stories that can be told, but the very structure of what becomes narratable. The analysis combines close study of engine documentation, postmortem reports, and available source code with comparative readings of representative titles from each period.

The findings reveal systematic patterns. In the microprocessor era, cutscenes exist as subroutines indistinguishable from game code, puzzles emerge as logical state structures in text adventures, dialogue remains unidirectional system output, and quests exist as scattered boolean flags. Then, mass storage enables cutscenes as distinct

in-game sequences with SCUMM-like scripting, inventory puzzles as designed objects with explicit conventions, dialogue as structured conversation trees, and quests as visible journal entries. Hardware 3D produces real-time cinematics with frame-precise timeline scripting, spatial puzzles integrated into simulated environments, complex dialogue graphs managed through non-technical authoring tools, and the industrial quest-as-database-record model. Middleware consolidates integrated narration without interruption, emergent physics-based puzzles, dialogue as character-construction with deferred consequences, and branched quests with parallel state management. Cloud infrastructure introduces continuous-update pipelines for cinematics, emergent systems producing unanticipated solutions, situational dialogue generated by rule engines, and quest grammars dynamically instantiating missions.

In conclusion, our research reconceptualizes and renames the technological history of video games through a narrative perspective, proposing a coherent sequence of five epochs: Hardcoded Narrative Structures (1970s–mid-1980s), Interpreter-Mediated Narrative Architectures (late 1980s–mid-1990s), Scripted Sequence Frameworks (mid-1990s–mid-2000s), Node-Based Branching Systems (mid-2000s–mid-2010s), and Event-Driven and Data-Oriented Narrative Systems (mid-2010s–present). This periodization highlights how each technological context both shapes (and is in turn reshaped by) evolving practices of narrative design. This reformulation demonstrates that video game narrative evolution is not linear progress toward expressive freedom but a series of structural reorganisations determined by the material capacities of each technological epoch, where each innovation simultaneously redefines the possibilities and limits of interactive storytelling through its implementation architecture.

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The (Not So) Global Game Jam: A Variantological Perspective on the Local Histories of Game Jamming Cultures in Poland and Japan

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Keywords: *Game jams, Game creation, Variantology, Media archaeology*

Abstract

Both popular and academic discourse often frame game jams as (1) a phenomenon that originates from the US in the early 2000s, but (2) has since spread all around the globe. At a surface level, both of these facts are demonstrably true. The first self-described game jam—the Indie Game Jam—took place in March 2002 in Oakland, California (Lai et al., 2021). And, since the establishment of the annual Global Game Jam (to cite just one example) in 2009, it has spread to hundreds of locations worldwide: e.g., the 2026 instalment boasted 811 sites in 94 countries (Global Game Jam, 2026).

This framing, however, obscures the fact that game jamming is far from a culturally homogeneous phenomenon, its history is not linear, and its genealogies and periodization may vary between different parts of the world. In August 2002, just months after the first Indie Game Jam in California, the Lithuanian Game Developers Jam-Session was held in Kaunas, Lithuania, demonstrating that game jamming became international almost immediately (Lai et al., 2021). Furthermore, even ostensibly worldwide events such as the Global Game Jam display variation across different regions and cultures, where they become adapted to the local context (Yamane, 2013), due to having to integrate into the broader fabric of their existing game creation cultures in a process of cultural glocalization (Hopper, 2007).

This paper will discuss two central questions:

What pre-existing game development and creative computing cultures did game jams build on in different regions?

What regional differences did game jamming cultures develop?

It will examine these questions by comparing two local cases, Poland and Japan, in terms of the contexts in which game jams emerged there and subsequent developments in their regional game jamming cultures. This will be done through a variantological lens (Zielinski, 2019). In other words, the paper's aim is not to establish a clear chronology or genealogy, but instead to take phenomena “that are not part of the established history of progression and look at them not as dead ends but as variations, alternative modes that present alternative ways of thinking” (Hancock, 2015).

The first part of the paper will examine earlier contexts related to grassroots-level game creation and creative computing more broadly. In Poland, like in many European nations, one of the most prominent such contexts is the demoscene, which was thriving starting in the early 1990s and was in many ways intertwined with games (Marecki and

Cieślewicz, 2020; Pigulak, 2023; Tyni & Sotamaa, 2014). In Japan, while community spaces for game creation were not common until the late 2000s, dōjin events such as the Comiket brought together thousands of popular culture fans, including hobbyist game creators eager to share their work (Fiadotau, 2019). The online furigēmu (freeware game) scene was another notable context for hobbyist game creativity; as were game contests organized by gaming magazines since the early nineties (Ito, 2007).

After outlining these contexts, the paper will discuss the emergence of game jams in the two countries and the distinctive features their respective game jamming cultures have developed. In Japan, for example, game jams quickly attracted mainstream media attention (Shin et al., 2012) and spread to areas fairly remote from the major urban centers, often serving to mobilize the local community or draw attention to local issues. (A case in point is the 2011 Fukushima Game Jam, held in Minamisoma, a city that just months earlier had been partially evacuated due to its proximity to the damaged Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.)

This paper—while methodologically influenced by media archeology—is predominantly based on traditional historical methods, such as a critical analysis of primary and secondary sources, including archival materials, oral history interviews, and academic publications in the national languages.

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When Did the Video Game Crash Become an Event? Asynchronous Gaming Histories in Turkey and Poland

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Keywords: *Video Game Crash of 1983, Video game history, Periodisation, Turkey and Poland, Computing magazines*

Abstract

The Video Game Crash of 1983 is commonly treated as a defining rupture in the historiography of digital games (Newman 2017; Wolf 2012). In many accounts of video game history, the Crash functions as a key chronological marker separating successive phases in the development of the medium: it marks the collapse of the North American console market, the decline of Atari as an industry leader, and the restructuring of the industry that preceded the rise of Nintendo (Donovan 2010). Such periodisations implicitly assume that the crisis constituted a globally experienced turning point. Yet from the perspective of historical consciousness and collective memory, events acquire historical significance only when they become recognized within specific communities (Halbwachs 1992). The extent to which the Crash functioned as a historically meaningful event outside the core markets of the video game industry therefore remains insufficiently examined. This paper addresses this question through a comparison of computing magazines and technology journalism in Türkiye and Poland during the 1980s and early 1990s, contributing to broader debates about how canonical periodisations travel across different regional contexts.

Poland and Türkiye were located on opposite sides of the Cold War divide, with Poland within the Soviet sphere of influence and Türkiye within NATO, and they followed different developmental trajectories. Nevertheless, both countries share an experience of military interventions (1980 in Türkiye and 1981 in Poland) and economic hardship during the early 1980s. Within the global circulation of computing technologies and consumer electronics, they occupied semi-peripheral positions (Wallerstein 2004). Consequently, the diffusion of hardware, software, and technical knowledge followed trajectories that diverged from those characteristic of the United States or Japan, producing asynchronous technological temporalities in which older platforms circulated alongside newer systems (Parikka 2012).

The near absence of the 1983 Video Game Crash in Polish and Turkish computing magazines and technology journalism during the period in which it occurred provides a clear illustration of this dynamic. Discussion of the Crash enters local narratives of computing only retrospectively from the late 1990s onward, particularly in histories produced by enthusiasts in retro computing magazines, fan publications, and early internet forums. In these contexts, the Crash was mobilized as a tool for connecting local histories with aspirations toward "Westernization", its status was constituted through later processes of narration and interpretation (Koselleck 2004). This gesture – similar to fans collecting original copies of games that were not available locally at

the time of release – obscures the memory of local conditions, which can be conceptualised not only as a "delay" but also as part of a situation that later gave rise to strong gaming industries.

The paper therefore argues that canonical turning points do not function as universally shared markers of periodisation. Instead, their status as historical events emerges unevenly through processes of narration and retrospective interpretation. This suggests that dominant chronologies of video game history reflect the historical consciousness of core markets and the international circulation of these narratives rather than the historically specific trajectories through which gaming cultures developed asynchronously in semi-peripheral contexts.

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Obsolete Futures: The Turkish Atari 2600 and Asynchronous Video Game Histories

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Keywords: *Video game history, Atari 2600, Grey markets, Technological temporalities, Türkiye*

Abstract

Histories of video games are often organised into epochs defined by technological generations, platform cycles, and industry crises (Newman 2017). These chronologies are typically derived from developments in the core markets of the video game industry, particularly the United States and Japan. As a result, developments such as the rise of Nintendo in the mid-1980s, the transition from 8-bit to 16-bit consoles, or successive console generations are often treated as universal markers of historical periodisation. Such frameworks produce a largely linear and implicitly teleological narrative of video game history structured around the economic fortunes of major corporations and successive hardware platforms.

Research in science and technology studies has long demonstrated that technological change rarely unfolds in a linear or synchronised fashion (Edgerton 2006). Technologies persist, overlap, and acquire new meanings as they move across different economic and cultural contexts (Bijker 1995). When histories of technology are organised around narratives of innovation and obsolescence, technological trajectories that fall outside these dominant timelines often disappear from view (Gitelman 2006). This is particularly the case in semi-peripheral contexts, where access to computing technologies was mediated through informal infrastructures of circulation and shadow media economies (Lobato 2019), producing asynchronous technological temporalities in which older platforms circulated alongside newer ones (Parikka 2012).

The Turkish Atari 2600 offers a striking illustration of this dynamic. Introduced into the Turkish market in 1984 through the activities of the Istanbul-based electronics firm Meta Elektronik Endüstri (ME-TA), the console appeared nearly a decade after its original North American release and shortly after the Video Game Crash of 1983 that destabilised the global console industry. In other words, a platform widely considered technologically obsolete in its original markets was simultaneously entering circulation in Türkiye as a newly accessible consumer technology. Despite its late arrival, the locally assembled Atari 2600 remained in circulation for nearly a decade and had sold approximately 9,700 units by 1988, with an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 cartridges circulating within the Turkish market (Furman 2026).

Rather than dismissing the Turkish Atari 2600 as a marginal or obsolete device, this paper situates it within the specific economic and infrastructural conditions that shaped the emergence of video game culture in Türkiye during the 1980s. In this context, the console becomes a revealing artefact through which to examine how local market dynamics, informal distribution networks, and grey-market imports structured

the circulation of gaming technologies. The case of the ME-TA Atari 2600 shows how efforts by a local distributor to compete with an established grey market led to the implementation of an early hardware-based region-locking mechanism, anticipating the more widely documented region-control strategies later associated with companies such as Nintendo (Kerr 2006). By foregrounding these locally specific technological adaptations, the paper demonstrates how artefacts often dismissed as obsolete can illuminate alternative technological trajectories that remain largely invisible within dominant narratives of video game history. Examining devices such as the Turkish Atari 2600 therefore offers a way to rethink the chronology of gaming history by revealing the uneven and context-dependent ways in which gaming technologies circulated and acquired significance across different regions.

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Grassroots of Digital Europe

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Keywords: Turkey, United Kingdom, Ireland, East Germany, West Germany, Platforms, Demoscene, Grassroots, Media Transfers

Abstract

This research presentation brings together four authors from the upcoming edited collection *Silicon Dawn: Creative Computing in Europe (1970–2000)*, set for open access release by De Gruyter Brill in 2026. This project is the first transnational and comparative attempt to chart how digital technologies emerged and were embraced across Europe, revealing a continental heritage that is at once shared, uneven, and deeply shaped by regional specificities – an approach that resonates with media-archaeological and critical game-historiographical efforts to move beyond linear ‘grand narratives’ (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011; Lowood and Guins 2016).

Our panel for History of Games 2026 provides synthesised findings from three of the book’s games-history-focused chapters, exploring game development, distribution, localisation, and hacking in Turkey, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and East and West Germany between the 1970s and early 1990s. It also explores the overarching theme of media transfers that is evident throughout the GRADE COST Action. In foregrounding informal economies, DIY practices, and non-centred histories, our presentation demonstrates how game cultures have often developed through amateur infrastructures, local constraints, and practices that sit outside commercial ‘mainline’ accounts (Švelch 2018; Swalwell 2021).

Silicon Dawn positions and defines creative computing as using intrinsic parts of a computer as central to the creative process, featuring 18 core chapters by 42 authors from 18 countries, some of which no longer exist. Its story is intrinsically intertwined with the historical, technological, and political context of Europe from the 1970s to the 2000s. Topics explored include the regional impacts of early internet and bulletin board systems, hardware and software hacking and homebrews, informal digital distribution networks, digital art and the demoscene, and video game distribution and localisation. These parallel wider histories of hobbyist networking and grassroots online community infrastructures (Driscoll 2022) and user-driven game making and hardware experimentation (Swalwell 2021). The collection thereby moves the question of periodisation from a solely temporal to a spatio-temporal plane by accounting for uneven access, distinct technological pathways, and diverse grassroots infrastructures that shaped computing cultures across different places within the same historical moment (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011; Nicoll 2019).

Our presentation thus demonstrates how any attempt to define ‘ages’ of games must remain sensitive to regional, political, and cultural specificities. While dominant

narratives of game history often present neatly bounded epochs (Golden Ages, generations, crashes, and revolutions), these framings risk obscuring the uneven development, grey markets, and informal practices that shaped gaming cultures outside widely studied centres. These are precisely the kinds of historiographical blind spots that critical lexicons and ‘minor’ or transitional histories seek to bring into view (Lowood and Guins 2016; Nicoll 2019). By presenting research spanning from Turkey, the UK, Ireland, and East and West Germany, our work highlights how periodisation looks markedly different when traced through local constraints, infrastructures, and creative practices, including those operating in the shadow of official markets and formal distribution (Švelch 2018; Swalwell 2021). This geographically grounded approach complements and complicates universalist histories, showing that what counts as a transformative event or defining technological shift varies by place (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011; Nicoll 2019). In doing so, our contribution discusses who defines gaming’s epochs, how they are anchored, and what becomes visible (or invisible) when periodisation is treated as uniform rather than plural (Lowood and Guins 2016).

This edited volume is a research output from the EU COST (Cooperation in Science and Technology) funded research project GRADE (Grassroots of Digital Europe: From Historic to Contemporary Cultures of Creative Computing). *Silicon Dawn’s* publication coincides with the 2026 conclusion of GRADE, which, between 2022 and 2026, has held conferences and workshops connecting the creative computing industry, academia, and grassroots practitioners to develop a holistic body of research informing public policy, the communication of ideas, and open academic publishing.

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Media Matters: Storage Technologies as Sub-Platforms in 1980s Home Computing

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Keywords: *Cassette tapes, 8-bit computing, Atari, Commodore, Microcomputers*

Abstract

Using an emulator today, we can load files without even knowing how they were stored on the original machine. It is thus worth remembering that several computers from the 1980s, such as the Commodore 64 or the Atari 8-bit, used three alternative media – cassette tapes, floppy disks, and cartridges.

The aim of my talk is twofold. First, I wish to highlight the specificity of these media and argue that they could be treated as sub-platforms. Second, I want to focus on cassette tapes and discuss historical approaches to improving the cassette user experience.

When you consider the differences between floppies, cartridges, and tapes, it is natural to focus on their access speed and ease of use. Games on tapes took a long time to load (Claypool et al., 2024), cartridges were instantaneous, and floppies represented a good compromise. What the perspective of speed ignores is how the specifics of these media affected the types of games distributed on them. Cartridges enabled creators to exceed the memory capacity of microcomputers but did not support save states, prioritizing action games. Floppies allowed random access to data and an easy way to handle save states, enabling the creators to produce non-linear, open-world games such as *Alternate Reality: The City* (Datasoft 1985) and *Phantasie* (Strategic Simulations 1985). Creators who targeted tapes as the dominant medium resorted to either smaller games that could be loaded entirely into RAM or linear experiences that loaded subsequent levels one-by-one, such as *Rick Dangerous* (Core Design 1989).

The differences between games across media become even more interesting when we realize that medium preferences varied across regions and social groups (Švelch 2018). Disk drives were often perceived as prohibitively expensive (Piotrowski, 1990), as their cost could exceed that of the microcomputer, and cartridges could not be easily pirated. For this reason, the libraries of games available in regions that resorted to piracy or catered only to cost-conscious users were often very different from those available on the same platform elsewhere.

On the other hand, tape users who could not afford to upgrade to a disk drive created their own computing culture unknown in other regions.

In the second part of the lecture, I focus on examples of how users of Atari 8-bit and Commodore 64 computers tried to improve the tape format to make it more convenient. One example of the creative use of cassettes was recording radio-broadcast games, which gave users a taste of downloading software long before the Internet

(Kluska & Rozwadowski, 2015; Skågeby, 2015). Another example was the introduction of so-called "turbo" systems (Richter, 1987) that dramatically sped up loading time. Due to technological limitations, turbo systems provided a unique experience. On the one hand, they were typically coupled with a software suite delivered on a cartridge and provided a DOS-like environment for cassette drives. On the other hand, they were unable to overcome the fundamental limitation of cassettes – sequential data access. On top of this, turbo systems were not compatible with multi-load games, which blocked piracy-focused regions from more complex gaming experiences.

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Two Histories of Magic: Tracing Divergent Trajectories of Magical Thinking in Western and Chinese Game Design

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Keywords: *Cultivation games, Magical thinking, Cosmotechnics, Wuxia, Game history, Chinese game*

Abstract

The return of magical thinking in contemporary popular culture has been well documented. Sobchack (2014) argues that as digital technologies become increasingly opaque, Western media culture has shifted from science-fictional rationalism toward mythic and magical modes of apprehension. In the Chinese context, a parallel yet distinct phenomenon can be observed in the explosive popularity of cultivation (xiuxian) narratives across online literature and videogames. This paper traces two historically situated trajectories of magical thinking in game design. It examines how different cultural and design lineages have shaped divergent approaches to magic in games.

The first trajectory follows the Western RPG tradition, in which magic has predominantly functioned as an external instrument for combat and problem-solving. From early tabletop-inspired systems to contemporary open-world RPGs such as *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt Red, 2015), magical abilities tend to operate as tools the player wields against the environment. This design logic resonates with what scholars have described as technomysticism (Davis, 2015), where technology is treated as something akin to magic, powerful yet opaque, to be mastered from the outside.

The second trajectory emerges from Chinese game design. It traces a lineage from 1990s wuxia (martial arts) games, where combat mechanics dominated and cultural cosmology served largely as atmospheric backdrop, to contemporary cultivation games such as *Immortal Way of Life* (Chalcedony Network, 2019) and *Amazing Cultivation Simulator* (GSQ Games, 2020). In these later titles, magic is no longer merely an external weapon. Instead, it is reconceived through Daoist frameworks of inner alchemy (nei dan) and cosmological systems such as the Five Elements (wuxing). Gameplay mechanics, including staged cultivation processes, qi-circulation systems, and feng shui construction, encode cosmological principles as interactive rule systems. This invites players into what Yuk Hui (2016) theorizes as “cosmotechnics”: the unification of moral and cosmic orders through technical activity.

Rather than positing these two trajectories as essential cultural differences, this paper treats them as historically contingent design lineages shaped by specific literary traditions, market contexts, and philosophical resources. The transition from wuxia to cultivation games was not a smooth inheritance but involved tensions. These include conflicts between action-oriented gameplay and contemplative self-cultivation, between structured progression systems and Daoist ideas of cyclical temporality, and between commercial pressures to “level up” and philosophical impulses toward

attunement. Current cultivation games, even as they foreground cosmological principles, remain embedded in achievement-driven design conventions that can work against their own philosophical commitments.

By placing these two trajectories in dialogue, this paper argues that the history of magic in games is not a singular narrative. It encompasses multiple, regionally and culturally inflected periodisations that challenge universalizing accounts of game history. Attending to these parallel histories reveals different relationships between technology, magic, and cosmology in game design, as well as the productive tensions within each tradition.

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Japan's "Other" Oldest Indie Game Festival: The Digital Games Expo, 2013-2026

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Keywords: *Japan's "Other" Oldest Indie Game Festival: The Digital Games Expo, 2013-2026*

Abstract

Japanese independent game development has a long history, with some of the first indie games created by hobbyist and amateur developers for fan-driven maker events like the Comic Market (Hichibe 2011). English-language mass media and academic scholarship has variously mapped the role and significance of Japan's "first" indie game festival, BitSummit, and its central position within indie game development in Japan (Vogel 2017; de Pablos 2024; Pennington and Newman 2024; Cuthbert, Murakami, and Nakamura 2025). Within histories of indie games in Japan, the establishment of BitSummit was considered an epochal event that popularized the term "indie" with players and developers in Japan and connected them to a global indie games movement distinct from the long-running hobbyist scene. This presentation offers an historical record of the "other" first indie game festival, Digital Games Expo, or "Digigehaku" as it is termed in Japanese, a showcase that launched the same year as BitSummit in Tokyo for the purpose of exhibiting and connecting indie game developers. In doing so, I hope to provide a counterpart to the existing discourses that tend to privilege the role of BitSummit within indie game communities in Japan and also sketch out some of the complexity and diversity within Japan's indie game communities that have also been inspired by this less chronicled but still important and influential showcase.

Since 2013, Digigehaku has staged an annual, low-threshold public event that prioritizes face-to-face demoing, conversation, and community formation primarily within the Akihabara area. Digigehaku's historical significance is best understood through operational practices that cater to a distinct mode of indie promotion that prioritizes accessible participation and tool-sharing alongside the display of games. This model, I argue, is a dominant one for indie game events in Tokyo and in various areas around Japan, focusing on connecting domestic producers with players in Japan as opposed to the broader international scene or industry publisher. In this presentation, I analyze Digigehaku's catalog archive (including event guides, booth lists, participation requirements, sponsorship materials, and organizer statements) alongside semi-structured interviews with its organizers and promoters for the purpose of understanding for who and what the showcase was originally intended, how these intentions were maintained or altered over the years, and how the showcase has adjusted to account for the growing popularity and ubiquity of indie game development in Japan. Through these archives and interviews, I map an alternative yet complementary indie game scene that developed in and around BitSummit and its model of international and industry-facing indie game promotion and publicity.

Crucially, Digigehaku's focus on both exhibition and direct-to-consumer sales positions the event in-between the ecologies of curated, publisher-oriented indie game spaces like BitSummit and participatory, sales-driven markets like Comic Market.

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Made in Taiwan: The Wuxia RPG and the Periodisation of Taiwanese Game History

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Keywords: *Wuxia RPG, Taiwan game history, Genre periodisation, Regional game history, Indie renaissance, Historiography*

Abstract

The dominant narratives of video game history remain largely shaped by Western and Japanese perspectives, leaving entire regional traditions underrepresented or invisible. This paper examines the Wuxia/Xianxia RPG — a genre cluster exclusive to the Chinese-language market, encompassing both martial-chivalric (武俠) and immortalcultivation (仙俠) traditions—as a case study for proposing an alternative periodization of Taiwanese game history, while simultaneously questioning the criteria and politics of periodization itself. Wuxia RPGs emerged in Taiwan in the early 1990s under a unique confluence of conditions. Regulatory restrictions on public arcade machines in the 1980s contributed to redirecting entertainment demand toward home computers, while Taiwan's position as a global PC manufacturing hub (e.g., the Multitech “Professor” series) made home computers unusually accessible. Local developers, responding to this ready-made user base, began producing games suited to the technical constraints of the era: turn-based RPGs with text-heavy narratives.

Drawing on the structural conventions of Japanese RPGs while grafting Chinese literary traditions onto them, titles such as *Xuan-Yuan Sword* (1990) and *Chinese Paladin* (1995) established a genre characterized by a defining tension: borrowed form, localized content. These games became foundational not only to the genre but to the Taiwanese game industry as a whole. This paper proposes three periods in the development of Taiwanese Wuxia RPGs. The first period (1990–2000), the “Golden Age,” corresponds to the rise of the single-player game industry, codified by print media and large studios. The second period (2000–2015) is marked by industrial contraction: piracy and the rise of broad band internet and MMORPGs led many developers to relocate or dissolve, while gaming magazines also ceased publication, materially marking the boundary between eras. This era is often dismissed by nostalgic fan communities as a “lost age,” illustrating how periodization is frequently tied to the survival of the media that records it. The third period (2015–present) is characterized by an indie renaissance enabled by digital distribution platforms such as Steam and the democratization of development tools like Unity and Unreal Engine.

Works such as *Tale of Wuxia* (2016) and *Fate Seeker* (2018) represent continuations of the traditional Wuxia aesthetic, while *Legend of Mortal* (2024) demonstrates a bottom-up reclamation of genre history, signalling a reinterpretation of the genre increasingly inflected by Taiwanese local identity rather than a generalized pan-Chinese cultural imaginary. The paper argues that this periodization rests on two interrelated claims: the genre's resilience as a cultural carrier across all three periods,

and the historically specific conditions—industrial policy, manufacturing infrastructure, and cultural tradition—that made Taiwan as the genre's constitutive birthplace, irreducible to either Western or Japanese RPG frameworks.

Finally, the paper reflects on the politics of this invisibility. As titles such as *Black Myth: Wukong* (2024) bring Chinese-language game culture to global attention, there is a risk that the historical origins of the Wuxia RPG tradition—rooted in Taiwan—become absorbed into a broader "Chinese game culture" narrative. To periodise the Wuxia RPG is therefore also to make a claim about who authors genre history, and whose regional experience counts as history at all.

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What is Indie? Periodizing the Conceptualization of Chinese Indie Games from a Developer Perspective

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Keywords: *Chinese indie game, Steam, Genre, Gameplay style, Aesthetics*

Abstract

The rise of Chinese indie games has substantially galvanized the vitality of the domestic game industry and expanded the boundaries of gaming communities in China (Nakamura & Wirman, 2021; Chew, 2019). More than injecting creativity and innovation into a market otherwise dominated by gaming giants like Tencent and NetEase, China's indie scene has served as a critical mechanism for domestic developers to navigate strict state regulations, evade head-to-head competition with the giants, and explore overseas markets (Davies, 2024; Huang, 2021). However, indie games remain a highly fluid and contested concept in the Chinese game industry due to the shifting regulatory environment, the oligopolistic structure of the domestic market, and the significant influences of Western game development discourses (Guo, 2025; Davies, 2024; Jiang & Fung, 2019; Garda & Grabarczyk, 2016; Lipkin, 2013). Exploring China's periodization of indie games is at once conducive to a holistic understanding of how this scene achieves an organic growth but also presents a valuable opportunity to identify the uniqueness of Chinese indie games compared to their Western equivalents.

To achieve this periodization, we adopt a developer perspective. Indie game developers are constantly shaping, reshaping, and negotiating the indie game concept with the market, regulators, and collaborators (e.g., publishers) through game production. We focus on one format of their final product, the Steam store page, to fathom their conceptualization efforts, as the platform functions as a critical infrastructure for promoting and distributing their games within the broader indie game communities (Huang, 2021). Particular attention is paid to three key elements curated from the store pages: genres, gameplay styles, and aesthetics. These elements are chosen as prior research has documented their key roles in driving the trajectory of indie game development and constituting what indie games mean (Garda & Grabarczyk, 2016; Keogh, 2023; Lipkin, 2013).

In terms of method and data, we have curated relevant information from 3644 Steam store pages of Chinese games with the “indie” tag, including those already delisted, thanks to the Sales Ranking of Chinese Games (*guóyóu xiāoliàngbǎng*), a credible third-party curator focusing on the sales info of all Chinese games on Steam. Time-series analyses and LDA topic modeling were conducted to process textual data, including game release year, game tag, and game descriptions, to identify patterns and trends of Chinese indie games' genres, gameplay styles, and aesthetics. The results reveal that over the past 15 years, “Action” has been the dominant genre of Chinese

indie games until being replaced in 2018 by “RPG”. In terms of gameplay style, “Visual Novel” has led until its replacement by “Platformer” in 2020 and later “Roguelike” in 2023. Aesthetically, “Anime” ranks top until being replaced in 2020 by “2D”. Furthermore, 8 predominant types of indie games combining genre, visual styles, and aesthetics are identified through the topic modeling analysis, and their weights vary significantly by year. Combined, these results provide crucial cues for periodizing how indie games have been conceptualized by game developers in China since the early 2010s.

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History of Flash Games Monetization: Earning Money from a Free Game

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Keywords: *Monetization, History, Flash, Web, Games, Sponsorship, Advertisement, License*

Abstract

Flash, as a game creation tool combining drawing, animation, programming all in one place, and as a technology to produce a game contained in a single small browser-played swf file, marked early 2000s as a boom of free games created by individuals or small teams and distributed directly to players via multiple portals. The researchers of Flash games era highlight creativity and democratization of game creation; however, the business processes and the ways the developers were incentivized for their work are often omitted. The purpose of this paper is to present unique business model which was in place for roughly a decade between 2005 and 2015.

The author was a witness and a participant of most events during the second half of this period as a game developer and a member of administrative team of Flash games marketplace. Other research methods include interviews with game developers, community administrators and portal owners, who were active around 2005, and search in the Internet Archive database for the snapshots of Flash portals and developers' blog posts.

Portals provided Flash games for their audience for free and were earning mostly from the banners placed on the HTML part of the game page. Being interested in increasing the audience, portals began incentivizing developers to create new games. Cash prize contests were organized by ArmorGames (originally GamesOfGondor) since 2005 and Kongregate since 2007. This led to the emergence of a unique type of relations between indie game developers and big businesses - a sponsorship model.

The sponsoring portal paid the developer for integrating the portal branding (splash screen, clickable logos) and links (such as "More Games") into the game before its full release. Due to high virality of small swf files, new releases uploaded to a few most visited platforms (ultimately starting from NewGrounds) were soon found at thousands of websites, increasing the incoming traffic to the sponsor.

Introduction of MochiBot service by MochiMedia in 2005 gave a possibility for the developers to track the number of worldwide plays of their games. In 2007 MochiAds were launched, allowing developers to integrate banners into the Flash games and start earning independently from all the in-game banner views of the game across all the portals. Further developer earning possibilities expanded in 2009 with the emergence of microtransaction services like GamerSafe and MochiCoins.

Finding a sponsor for a game became much better organized since the establishment of Flash Game License (FGL) in 2007. FGL reviewed and rated submissions, presented

them to the sponsors according to their interests and organized an auction. The sponsor who offered the most preferable conditions for the developer won. Several types of sponsorship agreements were in place: exclusive, primary, performance-based, site-locks, together with a wide set of additional agreement parameters.

For thousands of developers FGL became an entry point to game development and a source of the first earned money from games. FGL community, uniting tens of thousands of members, was characterized by unprecedented financial openness, where many developers shared their earnings in forums or personal blogs. During its peak the total amount of deals exceeded \$400 000 per month and bid wars around best games happened often.

Flash games ecosystem existed till the shutting down of MochiMedia in 2014 and FGL auction in 2016. It presented a unique example of developer-centered market, which gave such renowned modern mobile and PC titles as Kingdom Rush, Bloons, Red Ball and others.

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Hong Kong Amusement Game Centres Past and Present

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Keywords: *Arcade culture, Game centre, Hong Kong*

Abstract

Amusement game centres (遊戲機中心/Arcades/Game Centres) once formed a central component of everyday videogame culture in Hong Kong (Ng, 2006). From a “golden era” in the 1980s to 2000 (Ying-Kit, 2025), when their numbers reached into the thousands, the sector entered a prolonged period of contraction, with more than 400 venues recorded in 2002 (Ng, 2015) and fewer than 200 licensed centres remaining by 2018 (Wirman & Jones, 2021). Despite media claims that the local arcade scene has since “died” (Luyao 2022), no empirical account has established how many centres remain or examined the rate and conditions of their disappearance. This project approaches the Hong Kong amusement game centre as an endangered form of videogame heritage and argues for the urgent documentation of these spaces as historical infrastructure rather than as nostalgic memory alone.

This study reports on a territory-wide census currently in progress that uses government licensing records to identify all legally registered amusement game centres and combines this archival dataset with systematic site visits to verify their continued operation. Scheduled to replicate an earlier survey conducted under the same temporal conditions, the project establishes a longitudinal method for measuring closure, survival, and spatial distribution across time. This approach treats licensing documents as historical sources and the physical arcade as a material artefact, enabling the writing of videogame history through urban space, regulation, and commercial practice.

Attention is given to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as a moment of structural rupture. Hong Kong’s anti-epidemic measures required the prolonged closure of leisure venues and imposed distancing regulations that were fundamentally incompatible with the spatial density and machine-to-machine proximity on which arcade play depends (Harb 2020a). While these measures are frequently cited in public discourse as a cause of the sector’s decline (1000regrets, 2023), their actual effects on the number and distribution of operating centres remain undocumented. By producing an updated census, the project provides the first empirical basis for evaluating these claims.

At the same time, the study examines the continued circulation of arcade imagery and machines within contemporary cultural contexts, including their appearance in local advertising campaigns with major brands such as Levis (2018) and McDonalds (2026) along with their incorporation into museum and curatorial events such as M+ at Night (2024). These recontextualisations position the arcade less as a functioning commercial venue and more as a symbol of collective memory, retro aesthetics, and

local cultural identity. The project therefore distinguishes between the material disappearance of arcades as everyday play spaces and their persistence as heritage objects and mediated representations.

By documenting a rapidly vanishing form of location-based play, this study contributes to the historiography of videogames beyond software and platforms. It proposes a repeatable method for recording arcade decline in real time and argues that Hong Kong represents a distinctive case in which regulatory frameworks, urban density, and post-pandemic economic conditions intersect to reshape the afterlife of arcade culture.

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From a Golden Age to Collapse and Revival: Periodising the FMV Genre

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Keywords: *FMV, Full Motion Video, Interactive Movie, Game Genre Periodisation, Game History*

Abstract

This paper proposes a set of periods describing the stages of development as well as the ebbs and flows of popularity of the Full Motion Video (FMV) game genre (Majewski & Knight, 2026) across the more than 40-year timespan of its existence. It is argued this periodisation is helpful for understanding the historical trajectory of the FMV genre and provides a contextual framework for the study of individual titles.

Periodisation is commonly used to describe the key stages across the lifespan of a medium, and more narrowly, the stages in the lifespan of a genre. Admittedly, due to the relative youth of videogames, their periodisation is less rigorously applied in academic contexts (e.g. Williams, 2012) than for films (Thompson & Bordwell, 2003), but various forms of periodisation can be identified in academic and popular discourse. These include technology-based periods or console generations (e.g. Wardyga, 2019), but also simply decades (e.g. Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca, 2024). Several authors on game genres have employed periodisation to organise a genre's history. Barton & Stacks (2019) build a six 'age' periodisation of the computer RPG genre, while Perron (2018) distinguishes five periods in his study of horror videogames. Both studies reveal significant evidence about their respective genres, making periodisation a useful and productive tool when cataloguing the evolution of a genre and delimiting research.

Employing ideas of film historiography from Thompson & Bordwell (2003), periodisation is seen as a way of organising evidence to explain the past. This present paper considers causality, influence, and key trends that define the proposed periods of the FMV game genre. The four periods proposed are: 1) the precursor period of the 'Early FMV' games until approximately 1992; 2) the 'Golden Age of FMV' from 1992 to 1997; 3) the 'FMV Interval' from 1998 to 2015; and 4) the 'FMV Indie Revival & Adaptations' period which begins in 2015 and continues to the present. The periods represent distinct stages in the genre's evolution, particularly in terms of technologies, design techniques, popularity, and production output. Strikingly, unlike the gradual qualitative buildup of the cRPG mapped by Barton & Stacks across several stages, FMV goes from its early period immediately into a Golden Age, which both begins and ends abruptly. FMV games virtually exploded in popularity as a genre (Perron, 2003, 2014; Russell, 2012), with numerous and popular games released in short succession within this timeframe, only to rapidly dissipate after 1997 (c.f. Fahs, 2008). Almost overnight, FMV games lost popularity, projects were cancelled or vanished into obscurity, beginning the long Interval period during which relatively few FMV games were made. This period lasts until 2015, when the release of *Her Story* and a few other titles

renewed interest in the genre especially among independent developers (Therrien, Poremba & Ray, 2020).

This periodisation of the FMV genre provides a valid way to frame the genre's history, helping to contextualise individual FMV titles. It also paves the way for further research, as much remains to be examined around the unusually sharp period delimitations, and key events triggering the transitions between periods.

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From Design Necessity to Ideological Effect: Periodisation and China in Civilization V

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Keywords: *Periodisation, Orientalism, Sinological Orientalism, Civilisation, China*

Abstract

This article examines how Sid Meier's Civilization V operationalises historical periodisation and argues that its "universal" timeline functions as a procedural form of Orientalism and Sinological Orientalism in the representation of China. Building on Koabel's account of periodisation in historical strategy games as the division of time into discrete, playable ages, the article treats periodisation not as a neutral interface convenience but as a meta-historical choice that structures what counts as historical change in the game world (Koabel, 2017). At the same time, the analysis incorporates postcolonial game studies highlighting Civilization V's tendency for a unified, imperial historical account (Ford, 2016). It also draws upon research concerning technological determinism within strategy game technology trees (Ghys, 2012), wherein technology dictates the framework for social and civilizational advancement.

The core argument is twofold. First, Civilization V's era system and technology tree embed a linear, technocentric model of history in which civilisations advance through the same sequence of epochs and unlock power through research progression. In gameplay terms, eras are tied to technological advancement, and technologies further unlock buildings, units, and other civilisational capacities, making technological progress the primary driver of historical differentiation. This produces a flattened historical grammar in which China is made legible through categories such as "Ancient," "Renaissance," and "Industrial," rather than through historiographical frameworks more central to Chinese historical narration, such as dynastic succession. Therefore, the game lends itself to an Orientalist and Sino-Orientalist interpretation (Said, 1978; Vukovich, 2013). This design choice represents more than just simplification; it is a historically situated universalization of Western temporal classifications.

Second, the article refines postcolonial critique by introducing an "A-decision" framework for reading strategy games. Rather than assuming deliberate ideological intent on the part of designers, I argue that historical simulations at the scale of Civilization must make singular, system-wide design decisions in order to remain computationally coherent and playable. In Bogost's terms, such decisions become procedural arguments. The game's rules do not simply depict history, but model how history works (Bogost, 2007). On this account, Orientalist and Sino-Orientalist effects should be read less as evidence of direct authorial intention and more as the ideological consequences of design defaults. This is especially relevant to sinological orientalism, where "China" is not only marked as different (Said, 1978) but increasingly absorbed

into a framework of presumed equivalence or convergence with Western historical norms (Vukovich, 2013; Sobral, 2023).

The article also analyses Chinese player responses, especially modding practices, as a form of counter-interpretation. Steam Workshop materials and fan projects centred on the Three Kingdoms and Warring States periods demonstrate attempts to re-periodise play, re-scale geography, and reframe Chinese history outside the base game's universal timeline. These responses suggest that player resistance is directed not only at overt stereotypes, but at the flattening of historical specificity itself. The study therefore contributes to game studies by connecting procedural rhetoric, postcolonial critique, and player modding into a single framework for understanding how historical games both standardise and contest civilisational representation.

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Is Game History a History of Thought?

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Keywords: *Game history, History of thought, Game design, Re-play*

Abstract

The definitions of game history, and the ways of periodizing it, are manifold. However, most fall within what Huhtamo termed the “chronicle era”. According to Croce, the key difference between chronicle and history is whether contemporary thought reaches into the past. History is always the living thought of contemporaries. This echoes Collingwood’s assertion that “all history is the history of thought”, which implies that history is a series of actions driven by thought, and that the only way to study history is to discern those thoughts by re-enacting them in the historians’ own minds. Game history is likewise a history of thought, since games are human artifacts shaped by their makers’ thoughts.

The re-enactment of game history comprises two aspects: (1) to re-think the philosophies, cultural assumptions, and intentions of the designers; and (2) to re-play the games, or to observe others’ play, to grasp their mechanics and the experiences they afford.

This study takes *Guan Du* (1996), the first Windows 95-based computer game published in mainland China, as a case study. Drawing on the design document and other contemporaneous sources, this analysis traces the designers’ thoughts and the broader context that shaped this game. The design of *Guan Du* was strongly driven by a sense of nationalist ambition. The development of Three-Kingdoms-themed games and game craftsmanship became a symbol of cultural competition with Japan.

The core gameplay of *Guan Du* was designed to create a realistic war-command environment. To achieve this, the game introduced a “command tent” using a subjective first-person perspective. Beyond this, the game also made detailed refinements to its war simulation. These design choices articulated a particular conception of “realistic war”, the highest commendation for a Chinese commander and the design philosophy behind *Guan Du*: “Devising strategies within the tent, securing victory a thousand miles away.”

Finally, when considering the periodization of game history from the perspective of the history of thought, we should not periodize it merely in linear, monumental, or arbitrary terms; rather, this study traces the roots of human thought. Wherever a rupture occurs in human thought, there lies the dividing line of gaming eras.

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Museums of Mastery: YouTube Gameplay Video Archives and the Erasure of Failure

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Keywords: *Super Mario Maker, YouTube, Video archives, Hauntology, Teleology*

Abstract

In this paper, I extend what Nylund et al. (2021) refer to as the “game heritage process,” namely, how game culture is written or transcribed into game cultural heritage. This is important because archives determine what can be said about the past (Derrida 1996; Foucault 1969), suggesting that before discussions about periodisation can begin, it is essential to first consider the conditions under which historical records are produced. This paper argues that, rather than reflecting history, amateur YouTube gameplay video creators act as disciplinary agents in reproducing a false teleology, in which videogames are tools for meritocratic display, not as sites for other forms of human (inter)activity.

This argument develops over three parts. First, it establishes its subject as a historical event: the 8-year period of *Super Mario Maker* (SMM), released for the Nintendo Wii U on 11 September 2015 and discontinued on 8 April 2024. The suitability of selecting SMM is discussed, noting the incongruity between the designers’ intent to nurture a space for player creativity and expression and its representation in YouTube gameplay videos, which cast SMM as a playground for high-performance players.

Second, by examining the cultural logics that turn live gameplay footage into recorded material, we find our first form of erasure. Here, I differentiate between the logics of livestreaming and those of video-on-demand. If the former relies on immediacy and the present tense, then its recording becomes a spectre, a *haunting* of a present lost (Derrida 1994; Fisher 2013). To elaborate, I conduct a close reading of Failstream’s *Final Flight Clear video*, which captures the moment when Failstream finally manages to clear his own level creation after an astonishing 481 hours of attempts. Here, I describe how the image, itself a superimposition of multiple images, is *haunted* by failure—embodying both the presence and absence of past failed attempts. I then argue that, through his choice of editing, Failstream is effecting a teleological rupture (Gunning 2006), erasing evidence of human error in favour of narrative continuity.

This erasure becomes even more apparent in its second form: the amateur curatorial practices of “museum making” (Moncunill-Piñas 2017) carried out by YouTube gameplay video content creators. Therefore, third, I draw parallels between Failstream’s construction of the competent subject and broader meritocratic ideals associated with videogames (Paul 2018). As a result, by internalising such logics, the amateur video curator unintentionally acts as a disciplinary agent selecting only competent, transcendent play for their archives. In conclusion, recognising that (an)archives of this kind may serve as feed-forward mechanisms (Murphie 2016), with

players accepting that messy, unproductive, incompetent, inefficient, “bad” or “lost” players are not deemed historically significant, lays the groundwork for future research.

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From Absorbed Execution to Reflexive Authorship: An Emergent Tendency in Virtual Photography

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Keywords: *Virtual photography, Reflexive authorship, Procedural design, Photo mode, Game history*

Abstract

Virtual photography in games has generated a substantial historical record organized around platform infrastructure and player communities (Möring and De Mutiis, 2019; Krichane, 2021; Poremba, 2007; De Mutiis, 2024). That record documents what players photographed and how the tools changed across platforms. This paper reads it through a different lens. It asks whether players became aware of the camera itself as a designed object whose prior compositional program, in Flusser's terms, shaped what they wanted to photograph before they raised the viewfinder (Flusser, 2000). It argues that certain game designs have begun to make that condition perceptible, constituting an emergent tendency in the history of virtual photography.

Heidegger's distinction between ready-to-hand and present-at-hand engagement supplies the mechanism Flusser leaves unaddressed. For Heidegger, a tool in fluent use disappears into the act of using it. The photo mode's constraints on which moments are reachable consequently feel like the player's desire to find and frame a subject that seems worth capturing, rather than a prior compositional program (Heidegger, 1962). Lash's aesthetic reflexivity names what overcoming that condition looks like from inside the player's experience, specifically the moment a player finds that the desires shaping their choices were produced by the game's program before that session began (Beck, Giddens, and Lash, 1994). Together, these concepts identify the requirements for designed reflexivity in virtual photography. The player, at some point, realizes that the subjects they chose to photograph were already chosen for them.

In practice, absorbed execution takes its most fluent form in *Firewatch* (Campo Santo, 2016) and *Alba* (ustwo games, 2020), where photographable subjects present themselves as discovered rather than the product of a designed compositional program. Three cases resist this by design. In *Umurangi Generation* (Origame Digital, 2020), pressing the shutter gradually confronts the player with the recognition that the fragments of a dying city available to photograph were determined before they picked up the camera. *Return of the Obra Dinn* (Lucas Pope, 2018) deepens that confrontation, as each imaging act becomes an archival judgment whose correctness determines which crew members' histories become recoverable. In *Viewfinder* (Sad Owl Studios, 2023), that confrontation becomes irreversible, as photographing a picture converts it into the environment itself, replacing what was there.

Finally, a practice-led case attempts to engineer what the game cases achieve incidentally. In it, participants generate AI images within 360° panoramic photographs of a culturally specific Hong Kong site. Furthermore, the case is designed so that the

model's output does not match participants' expectations, given their familiarity with the site. That gap makes the model's 'program' perceptible as a construct of training data rather than the participant's cultural knowledge (Miller, 2024). What connects these cases is an emergent tendency in virtual photography practice defined not by new infrastructure alone but by infrastructure built with a specific purpose. That purpose is to make the act of taking a picture turn back on itself, asking whose choices shaped what the camera could see.

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A History of Niantic's Platformisation: Location-based Games as Platforms

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Keywords: *Mobile gaming, Pokemon go, Platforms, Augmented reality, Location-based gaming*

Abstract

It's been 10 years since the release of the location-based augmented reality game Pokémon Go. Since then, developers Niantic have yet to produce a game with the same global popularity, cancelling numerous projects (Campbell, 2021; McWhertor, 2021), firing a number of staff (Schreier, 2022), and eventually selling all their gaming assets to Scopely in 2025 for \$3.5 billion USD (Reuters, 2025). I argue that Pokémon Go is a particular moment in mobile and location-based gaming history. This is situated within a wider history of mobile and locative gaming (Leorke, 2018), at the intersection of brand recognition (Keogh, 2017), the rise of augmented reality filters in social media (Miller, 2025), and the possibility of public play. What I term 'The Pokémon Go' moment builds on Burgess (2012) iPhone moment, the iPhone signified a design and discursive shift in mobile media. Pokémon Go was immediately popular, surpassing Tinder and Twitter (since renamed X) in downloads (Smith, 2016), and has consistently sustained a dedicated player base (Curry, 2026) despite becoming less discussed in public forums. Pokémon Go is just one piece of Niantic's history and their development of a globally expansive location-based gaming engine – built from phases of player labour. A history of Niantic as a developer reveals their adoption of platform strategies and the role players have had in shaping the future of location-based gaming technologies.

This paper provides an overview of Niantic's gaming history, tracing their process of platformisation across multiple interactions of digital gaming and how the company has embedded platform logics accumulating users, mobilisation of user labour, and monetization of data, to maintain their data gathering capabilities across multiple community led cartography technologies. It is beyond the scope to provide a detailed history of all of Niantic's games and instead will focus on key developmental milestones that contribute to Niantic's platformisation. Firstly, this paper starts with the community-lead cartography of Niantic's first game Ingress and explores how these maps are ported and re-used in Pokémon Go, forming the basis of Niantic's gaming infrastructure. Secondly, how Niantic's maps have been used in collaborations for a range of games to limited success, from the now defunct Harry Potter: Wizards Unite to the popular Monster Hunter Now (Rees, 2023). These collaborations expand the userbase across multiple games, building niche audiences and new data collecting capabilities. Lastly, I explore the role of community labour in two of Niantic's technologies, the community-based cartography Wayfarer and the game development tool Lightship. Through the mobilisation of player labour, Niantic have become the most financially viable location-based and augmented reality gaming company, selling off

their gaming assets to Scopely for 3.5 billion USD in 2025 (Reuters, 2025), and pivoting to become Niantic Spatial, a geospatial AI mapping company. By exploring the role of platformisation in a gaming companies' history, this paper explores the implications of digital gaming companies operating as platforms, and what this means for players data and labour.

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From Agon to Agon: periodizing TTRPG history using Roger Caillois

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Keywords: *Tabletop RPGs, Roger Caillois, Game design*

Abstract

From Agon to Agon: periodizing TTRPG history using Roger Caillois

Our research offers a high-level periodization of the somewhat overlooked subject: history of tabletop RPG (TTRPG) game design. Authors of popular histories of TTRPG, like Appelcline (2014a; 2014b, 2014c, 2014d), Ewalt (2013), Horvath (2023) and Peterson (2021) tend to focus on the history of the industry itself, tracing stories of designers and companies, and approaching emergence of gaming conventions and player cultures as a form of realizing affordances presented to them by developers. An important exception are some works of Jon Peterson (2012; 2020) or Michael Tresca (2010).

This is notably different from grassroots reflection on the part of hobbyists themselves (e. g. Edwards 2004), who tend to focus on changes in game design, grouping games in the loosely-defined yet widespread categories like Old School, or using resonance (Apperley 2010) between games and genres of non-interactive fiction, emphasising processes like the popularity of epic fantasy in the 70s or urban fantasy in the 90s. In our work, we expand upon those attempts while trying to augment them with the historical literature mentioned above and ideas of affordances (Linderoth 2011; Shaw 2017) and simulation (Frasca 2003; Simpson 2011), to create a more formalized periodization of TTRPG game design.

However, mostly we rely upon Roger Caillois's four-part classification of games. Caillois distinguished between four different types of games: agon (competition), alea (chance), mimesis (mimicry), and ilinx (vertigo), acknowledging that specific games may encompass more than one type (2001, also Mortensen and Navarro-Remesal 2019). We propose that the TTRPG mainstream shifted from focusing on one or another of those types throughout its history, making it possible to organize our periodization into four somewhat distinct epochs.

1974–1981: agonistic period. Prevalence of mechanics supporting games as a struggle between the player characters (PCs) and the surrounding environment. It is also distinguished by the strong reliance on alea elements in games, with a strong focus on randomization and accompanying pleasure from partially relinquishing control.

1981–1999: mimetic period. While TTRPGs have always included references to non-interactive works of art, this period saw the rise of game mechanics designed specifically to recreate topics and characters of pop-cultural genres and narratives. It

is also characterised by increasing popularity of metaplots, and by toning down the role of alea in story creation in favor of prewritten scenarios.

1999–2014: ilinx period. Focus on strong, sometimes transgressive, emotional experiences at the expense of straightforward plots and agonistic challenges, though mimetic game design elements only grew in popularity. Its tendencies best exemplified by mechanics intended to facilitate emotional and interpersonal engagement, and the slow decline in metaplot popularity.

2014–present: D&D-indie period. The reemergence of D&D as the most culturally significant game in the market, with its agonistic logic serving as a blueprint for both game designers and players themselves. Coupled with the development of tendencies from the previous period, it led to a fragmentation of TTRPGs in terms of game design conventions, with cross-pollination between the two sectors exemplified by processes like the growing popularity of the so-called Old School Renaissance.

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Playing with Time: Indian Boardgames, Historiography and Questions of Periodization

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Keywords: *Periodization, South Asia, Boardgames, Decoloniality, Indigeneity, Oral history*

Abstract

There is, so far, scope for much more research on South Asian tabletop games and for posing key questions regarding their historiography. Where do we place these games that are considered to date back to hoary antiquity but where the provenance of the oldest surviving games is far newer and where the archival record provides little or no evidence? Indeed, one of the key problems of historicizing South Asian boardgames is the question of periodization.

Earlier research on boardgames in India focused on rules, geographic and demographic data. In the essays collected in *Sedentary Games of India* (Ray and Ghosh 1999) and *Indian Boardgames Survey* (Soni et al. 2011), structural and phylogenetic classification is preferred over cultural-specific contexts of play. Such research, started in colonial times, continued the earlier method of documentation in post-Independence India.

Current research on boardgames in South Asia, mostly originating in the Global North, is also heavily reliant on material and textual evidence. Schmidt-Madsen, for example, argues about the origin of Gyan Chaupar (the predecessor of Snakes and Ladders) that ‘no substantial evidence could be produced from before 1780-82’ (Schmidt-Madsen 2021) although the game had been thought locally to originate in the 12th century AD among Indian philosopher-sages. He similarly argues that Chaupar (from which Ludo and Parcheesi are said to have developed) is also a late invention and suggests that both games came to India as a result of European colonial intervention. Other scholars contend that ‘these games do not refer to the cultural or local context in which they are played. As a result, they spread across time and space, unaffected by sociopolitical borders’ (Danilovic and de Voogt 2021). Different as they are, both positions assume a degree of cultural homogeneity that needs questioning.

This raises a serious question regarding the periodization of South Asian boardgames. According to such research, either these games are much more recent than is locally claimed and are probably adaptations of games played in Europe, or they are so generic that they are unaffected by sociopolitical borders, implying that the periodization of these games is not affected by their society, culture and geography. These default assumptions, however, are contrary to local knowledge-systems and their claims of periodization.

Oral history accounts, etched games on temple floors and game sculptures and frescos cannot be neglected even where direct textual evidence is absent.(*) Textual and

archival evidence, predating the European presence in India, also presents itself on further detailed enquiry. Recent opinions are divided on periodization and Ebke and Haack describe it as ‘[a]n inherent component of Eurocentric colonial practice [which] persist unless we move beyond merely updating our chronological categorisations and challenge the very concept itself’ (Ebke and Haack 2025). The exploration of such periodization reveals evidence of games that have either eluded the colonial shaping of temporality or have been appropriated and recast by British colonialism into new games (see Mukherjee 2025), thereby further complicating the scenario of fixing a ‘period’ for these games.

Instead of a chronocentric thinking, this article focuses on decoloniality and indigeneity that encourages the cross-epochal study of multiple temporalities (see Koselleck 2004). It is time to rethink the periodization and, by extension, historiography of boardgames in India by prioritizing oral history and local knowledge-systems and decolonizing existing archival practices.

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- * Such evidence ranges from die-struck coins from 100 BC depicting Chaupar board to 12th century AD texts with clear references to the game.

Replaying ‘Ancient’ India: (re)Constructing Periodization through Modern Boardgames

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Keywords: *Ancient India, Mythology, Boardgames, Geopolitics, Stereotypes, Nation-state*

Abstract

During the Covid-19 lockdown in India, Romanian expat in India, Cristina Maiorescu designed and marketed Bharata 600 BC (2020), a modern Indian boardgame that gave ‘access to games Indians could relate to and that represented their culture’ (Gupta 2021). Maiorescu’s game features the sixteen mahajanapadas (early great realms) of ancient times and contains game pieces crafted by local craftsmen and claiming an ethnic value. Mostly dating back to the years just before and during the pandemic, many similar boardgames such as Indus 2500 BC (2020), Yuddhbhoomi (2019), Tales of Dharma (2025) and Cholas (2023) were released. These games now claim a pan-India audience and aim to construct a sense of a ‘unified ancient India’.

While there are multiple boardgames about ancient history globally, the recent surge in Indian boardgame makers staking a claim for what they describe as ‘ancient India’ is, arguably, one that is connected to the current geopolitical thinking in South Asia. This paper aims to study how boardgames contribute to the recasting of Indian history by investigating how they establish ‘Indianness’ and attempt to reinforce an unproblematic periodization.

In doing so, the paper also views boardgames within the milieu of the popular national mythologies created by earlier history-building media such as the graphic novels published by Amar Chitra Katha (1967), films and television serials such as Bahubali (2015) or Ponniyin Selvan: I (2022) and finally, novels such as Amish Tripathy’s *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010). The enquiry here will focus on whose history is being considered and what is being left out; as Michel-Rolph Trouillot addresses in his comment that ‘any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly’ (Trouillot 1995: 27). It will also re-examine the historical research that these games focus on while considering how they address simplifications, stereotypes, diversity and identity-formation in creating various nationhoods and notions of ancient glory. It will also connect these games with modern debates on Indian history and archaeology and also with past instances of boardgames being connected to national and imperial propaganda (see Norcia 2020).

Such a remediation of a historical narrativization will be studied by analysing the positions of the makers of these games, both Indian and international. The comparatively high prices of the games and their similarities to Western boardgames raises questions regarding their intended target audiences. This paper also aims to close-read the description and the rules of these games to assess the procedural

rhetoric (Bogost 2007) and the algorithmic construction of history (Galloway 2006; Lotker 2025) in these boardgames and finally, to speculate on why boardgames have been chosen to recreate/ remediate a sense of periodization that is linear, majoritarian and celebratory. In analysing a phenomenon from present-day South Asia, this paper hopes to connect to larger discussions of boardgames representing and reconstructing history in global contexts.

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The past is still here: The case of Nintendo and the “retro gap”, emulation, and the stages of preservation

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Keywords: *Preservation, Emulation, Nintendo, Unreleased games, Retro*

Abstract

Platform dependency is particularly strong in video games. This results in games becoming “dead” (Guay-Bénager, 2018) and stuck in their original platforms or available through media archaeology (Parikka, 2013). Accordingly, game history is frequently conceptualised in airtight periods, with little to no continuity between them. This presentation challenges the notion of “period ends” and argues that finished periods do not immediately disappear but continue to live on in parallel, usually via emulation (Stuckey, Swalwell, and de Vries, 2024). After a system leaves its “commercial lifespan” phase (1), it moves to informal preservation (phase 2), and then sometimes to official restoration and recognition as a retro piece (phase 3). Once primary elements become what we term “secondary strands”.

There are many examples of secondary strands in game culture, such as text games having constant production for 50 years (Reed, 2023), homebrew development, or commercial efforts such as the GOG Preservation Program and the curation conducted by Blaze for their Evercade family of hardware. These use techniques such as emulation to keep games accessible beyond the original experience (Swalwell, 2017). This study aims to contribute to and expand on the idea of “video game afterlives” (Guins, 2014) to see how games and technology mutate to coexist with modern platforms. In particular, we focus on official and unofficial emulation and what we call the “retro gap”.

In particular, this research focuses on the case of Nintendo and how the company moves their main platforms to secondary strands once they are discontinued. Beyond rereleases, two strategies have been identified: mini consoles and virtual consoles, both of them built on (legal) emulation. As a methodology, this study follows a systematisation in a timeline which includes when a system was released (R), discontinued (D), emulated (E), added to the Virtual Console (VC) or Nintendo Classics (NSO), and released as a mini console (M). This research shows that 1) unofficial emulators always appear first, and almost always before discontinuation, and 2) that there have been several batches of restoration, connected to wider commercial strategies. This restoration has brought the recovery of previously unreleased games, which are normally very valued by a subset of gaming communities (Navarro-Remesal, 2017). Of special interest is 3) “the retro gap”, the space between the discontinuation of a system and its recovery: for example, the NES disappeared for 10 years, the GameCube was stuck in limbo for 17, and the Virtual Boy just came back after 30 years. These figures more or less coincide with the popular assumption that it takes 20 years

for a platform to become “retro”. For game historians, this grey period should be vital: in the “retro gap”, systems can be poorly emulated, nostalgia might have not kicked in as a driving force, and documentation and preservation fades. This second stage is where the work of fans and tinkerers can be useful, and where historians can start to act, to anticipate and ideally ease the transition into the third phase of official restoration.

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Television as a Ludic Interface: Historicizing Hugo and Interactive Game Programming in Early 1990s Spanish Television

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Keywords: *Television, Hugo, Interactivity*

Abstract

Television played a crucial role in explaining, legitimizing, and popularizing video games during the formative decades of digital game culture. As Boellstorff and Soderman (2026) demonstrate in their analysis of TV POWWW! (an interactive segment enabling telephone-based gameplay) such programmes operated "at the nexus of several developments during the late 1970s and early 1980s," including experiments in participatory television, simplified videogame design adapted for broadcast contexts, and emerging forms of gendered spectatorship and play. Similarly, in the late 1970s, German-speaking Swiss television's Karusell incorporated gameplay segments and featured a title, Karussell Computerspiele, created specifically for televised interaction. These precedents established television not merely as a promotional vehicle for games, but as an active site of ludic experimentation and audience participation.

In Spain, the early 1990s represented a transitional moment in game culture, marked by the arrival of Japanese consoles and the growing presence of personal computers following a decade dominated by microcomputers. This reconfiguration of the technological landscape occurred alongside the popularization of VCR board games such as Atmosfear, which exemplified emerging hybrid forms of audiovisual and ludic consumption. During the first half of the 1990s, Spanish television experienced a boom in video game-related and interactive programming across both public and private channels: in 1993, Telecinco marketed the Teletrébol remote control (adapted from the French Quizako), while TVE deployed a similar system with Telepick, both introducing interactive features into selected broadcasts. On the other hand, programmes such as VideoXOC (TV3, 1992–1995) focused on game reviews and occasionally staged on-air tournaments, while game-centered shows gained prominence: El rescate del talismán (TVE, 1991–1994), sponsored by Sega, adapted the British series Nightmare, while Zona de juego (La 2, 1993–1995) drew on the American programme Nick Arcade.

In 1992, Telecinco introduced a segment within its lottery programme Telecupón based on the Danish interactive series Skærmtrolden Hugo (TV2, 1990–1995), created by Interactive Television Entertainment. Played remotely via analogue telephone, viewers controlled the main character, Hugo, through various challenges and its success led to a standalone programme, Hugolandia (Telecinco, 1992–1995). Despite its transnational circulation and technological innovation, Hugo remains underexamined in academic scholarship (with some exceptions: Konzack, 2004; Moesgaard, 2010; and

Konzack, 2015), a situation that reflects broader historiographical gaps in both the history of Spanish television and the study of interactive media.

Building on Swalwell's (2007) call (following Gunning) for a discourse on the perception of innovation, this paper historicizes Hugo within broader media-archaeological and televisual frameworks. Through archival research of broadcast materials and period press coverage, this study examines how interactive television mediated the cultural understanding of video games in European media history. Preliminary findings suggest that Hugo functioned as a crucial intermediary technology, introducing Spanish audiences to interactive gameplay mechanics while simultaneously domesticating the foreign technology of video games through the familiar medium of television. The programme's hybrid form (combining telephonic interactivity, broadcast spectacle, and ludic participation) reveals how television served not merely as a distribution channel but as a constitutive medium shaping early 1990s game literacy.

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A History of Ireland's Video Game Console Importation, Manufacturing, and Distribution Industry (1970s - 1980s).

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Keywords: *Ireland, Atari, Calcul International, Interton, MB, Milton Bradley, Vectrex, 2600, Consoles, Platforms, Trade*

Abstract

This research presents three previously obscured histories of video game console importation, branding, manufacturing, and distribution from Ireland in the 1970s to early 1980s, expanding beyond the internationally recognised impact of Atari's Irish operations. These stories centre around Calcul International and Interton, both located in Co. Clare in the west of Ireland, and Milton Bradley which was based in Waterford city on Ireland's south east coast.

The methodology for this research draws upon first-hand interviews, newspaper archives, and direct media archaeological exploration of related hardware, software, and paratextual materials.

German electronics manufacturer Interton established its Irish factory in 1974 which operated until 1983, and began recruiting workers to build game consoles in 1976. Their earlier systems including the Video 2400 (1977) used General Instruments AY-3 chips, the dominant Pong IC in Europe (Wolf 2012, 147). Interton released the VC 4000 in 1978. This ROM cartridge supporting system and its software-compatible Philips / Signetics 2650A CPU powered counterparts faced heavy competition from Atari's 2600 (Ernkvist 2009).

Just 27 kilometers away at the Shannon industrial complex, Calcul International was founded in 1974 by brothers Tom and Frank Flynn. Between 1977 and 1982 Calcul imported OEM TV game consoles from Korean hardware manufacturer Otron (Olympus Electronics) and Hong Kong company Soundic. These systems were repacked and sold in Ireland under Calcul's trademarked Telesport brand. The Otron sourced consoles ran Texas Instruments Pong clone chips. For example the Telesport 7600 (Otron 7600 in Korea), used the TMS-1965 (Kalata et al. 2025). Telesport's Soundic manufactured SD-50 used interchangeable cartridges containing General Instruments AY-3-8xxx logic chips (Amor 2023). True to their name Telesport in part sold their product through sports supplies retailers (Editor 1978).

October 1982 saw Atari set up its European manufacturing headquarters in Raheen, Co. Limerick, approximately 25km by road from both Ennis and Shannon (Walsh 1982). This was separate to Atari's arcade assembly and distribution hub in Ardfinnan, Co. Tipperary, established in 1978 (Temple 2017). The Raheen factory focused on the 2600 console line including the classic 'Woody' model and the all-black PAL format 2600 Jr. until its 1985 closure (McNiff 1985). Supported in part by the IDA, Ireland's Foreign Direct Investment Agency, it mirrored many electronics assembly and export

businesses in Ireland, at a time when Ireland was facing increasing competition in this sector from the far east.

Indeed Milton Bradley's European release Vectrex games were sourced from Hong Kong and Ireland (50BRD 2014), demonstrating both zone's economic equivalency for manufacturing and export. The fabrication of injection moulded cartridge shells (Lindberg 2024), acetate screen overlays, and packaging materials fitted neatly into MB Waterford's existing board game production infrastructure.

Interton, Calcul International, and MB's place in Irish video game history has been largely hidden and overlooked. This paper seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how their businesses, along with Atari, contributed to the Irish industrial landscape of 1970s and 1980s, and Ireland's part in the foundational stages of the international video games market.

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How Collecting 5,000 Gaming and Computing Magazines Became Infrastructure: A Personal Archiving Project and Korean Game Historiography

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Keywords: *Game history, Magazine archives, Personal archiving, Korean game culture, Game preservation, Historiographical infrastructure*

Abstract

In this presentation, I discuss a two-decade personal archiving project through which I have assembled approximately 5,000 issues of Korean gaming and computing magazines—the boundary between the two being notably porous, as Korean computing publications frequently carried substantial game-related content—comprising over one million scanned pages and more than 4TB of data. I examine how this individual effort has come to serve as historiographical infrastructure for an emerging field of Korean game history research.

The project originated in an attempt to recover development credits for early Korean games. Because the games themselves were difficult to locate, magazines became a proxy source. This initial search triggered a genealogical expansion of collection: PC game magazines led to earlier video game publications, then to 1980s personal computer journals, and eventually to electronics hobbyist magazines from the late 1970s. Each step backward uncovered a previously undocumented layer of Korean game culture. The collection now spans the full arc of Korean gaming print media, from its origins to the cessation of major print titles in the 2010s as online platforms supplanted print journalism.

For years, the collection lacked any means of systematic navigation. The implementation of an OCR-based full-text search system marked a turning point, transforming the archive from a static personal stockpile into an active research tool. Researchers can now trace shifts in industry discourse across decades, identify forgotten developers, and reconstruct production histories that no institutional archive in Korea currently supports.

Related efforts exist elsewhere. The CGW Museum has digitised the complete run of Computer Gaming World, making a landmark American PC gaming publication accessible to researchers worldwide. In Japan, the Dream Library (Yume no Toshokan) offers physical access to extensive collections of microcomputer and electronics magazines, while the Ritsumeikan Center for Game Studies maintains an institutional game archive of over 14,000 items with a publicly searchable online catalogue. My project occupies a distinct position among these: it focuses specifically on Korean-language gaming and computing print media—a body of material that no other archive, domestic or international, has systematically collected—and treats these magazines not as artefacts to be safeguarded but as primary sources that enable new historical inquiry.

The archive has also taken on roles I did not originally anticipate. I have supplied source materials for a domestic game industry documentary, provided reference images and texts for oral history interviews with early Korean developers, and supported academic discussions on the direction of Korean game historiography. What began as a personal endeavour has become a shared resource—but this also exposes a structural vulnerability: an entire field's source base currently depends on one individual's sustained commitment, with no institutional framework to support or succeed it.

I conclude by introducing the next phase of this project: the development of a dedicated search platform to replace the improvised cloud-drive workarounds that researchers have relied on until now, and my plans to use this improved infrastructure as a basis for sustained collaboration with researchers working on Korean game history.

From Magazine to Stream: An Analysis of Chinese Videogame History Through the Lens of Gonglue

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Keywords: *Gonglue, Strategy guide, Decentralization, Chinese gaming history*

Abstract

The history of videogames cannot be written solely through the lens of technological or commercial objects. Treating the videogame as an interactive medium demands equal attention to the history of how players are meant to interact with it over time. Gonglue, originally meaning “storm and capture” in ancient Chinese, is now understood as a strategy guide. Searching for gonglue is a common practice in videogame play, one that has lasted around 30 years in Chinese gaming. This paper argues that the evolution of gonglue, from printed magazines to community forums and online streams, offers a new perspective on understanding how Chinese videogame players engage with videogames, a history that is fundamentally decentralized in its formation.

I periodize the evolution of gonglue in China into three stages. In the first period, from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, printed game magazines were the primary form of gonglue. A fundamental component of their content was offering translations of important in-game vocabulary and instructions. This reflects a characteristic of play during the period: official Chinese localization was largely absent, compelling players to seek external assistance to understand and complete games. As a result, consulting gonglue became a common practice in Chinese gaming culture. With the advancement of the internet in the 2000s, online forums and communities emerged, marking the second stage. Several videogame websites were established during this time, including ALI (游侠网), Gamersky (游民星空), 3DMGAME, where players could post and discuss gameplay, mechanics, and strategies. These shifts enabled broader community participation, and gonglue came to exist across online forums and websites rather than being found only in magazines. The third stage is marked by the rise of social media and streaming platforms in the 2010s, during which many print magazines ceased publication. These platforms allowed gonglue to be presented more intuitively and affectively in audiovisual form and encouraged players to share and create content. User-generated content takes diverse forms, ranging from esports technique sharing to casual Let's Plays and extending to more unconventional content that demonstrates cheating, each shaped by distinct performative styles.

Reviewing these shifts, we can observe that magazine editors in the early period held considerable power over knowledge distribution, due to limited communication channels and the cultural authority of print media in the absence of localization. Gonglue in the print era thus created a relatively centralized knowledge ecosystem. Online forums and posts expanded community participation, rendering magazines no longer the only venue for gonglue and thereby fostering decentralized knowledge-sharing networks. Contemporary social media platforms further multiply the channels

and formats through which players access gonglue. Beyond presenting gonglue, player-generated content also functions as historical records of significant gaming events, documenting a gameplay history co-constructed by players and videogames.

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Game Over (Play Again?): Arcades as A-Periodised Locations of Laminated Space and Time

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Keywords: *Arcades, International contexts, Ethnography*

Abstract

Coin-op era. Console generations (and wars). Casual revolution. Indiepocalypse. Games-as-service. As we know – vernacularly, academically – game history is not short of catchphrases to describe periodisation. While these heuristics might help many of us to navigate gaming as a techno-cultural phenomenon, such constructs can create a false impression of uniformity and of constant paradigm-shifts. Periodisation is always an artificial endeavour to organise a continuous history, but not acknowledging the situatedness of these models can lead to arbitrary universalisation (see, for example, Banfi, 2023), or ignore influence of previous periods in latter ones. Moreover, the way games are experienced is often contingent on negotiation between public and private elements, from the way the social imaginary around games is established by public discourse (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Muriel & Crawford, 2018), to how we engage with games through first-hand experiences (Anable, 2018; Keogh, 2018). Gameplay is always a complex assemblage of elements.

Context, as recent developments in the history of games has shown, matters (Perani and Swalwell, 2022; Pérez-Latorre & Navarro-Remesal, 2022). The complex lamination of space, interface, time, and proximity to others encodes memories of shared play differently to how we recollect solo gameplay experiences, whether we discuss this through arcade play, playing on a console in a friend's living room, or a title we played through by ourselves and then lent to a friend. Of course, specifically discussing the spaces of shared gameplay, we must note they evolve as imposed interface periodisation responds to market forces, including shifts in 'marketable' genres, changing access to devices, and preferred business models.

In this paper, we look ethnographically (Sawyer & Norris, 2012) at collective play spaces, generally arcades, but with some specific alternatives from a Latin American context, such as locadoras (Penix-Tadsen, 2016; de Paula, 2021). In traditional periodisation, arcades are part of the early era of videogames, linked to coin-op business models, which fell out of favour with the rise of consoles in the 1990s (Banfi, 2023). However, as exposed by Pelletier-Gagnon (2024, p. 170), these are spaces that still exist, and there is limited research "on the dynamics of arcade gaming on a historical level".

If we consider the economics of games, and its intersection with class, privilege, and access, then we must discuss official and unofficial periods of games-as-social-play. Historically, arcades evoke a specific time, and unarguably their proliferation in culture is diminished from its peak. However, these spaces, anachronistically maybe, persist,

but in very different ways dependant on geographical location. The surviving arcades of Tokyo arguably represent arcades as originally conceived (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2024), however, in different locations they persist in other forms. In this paper we consider Tokyo, but also use the competing British models of community-driven FreePlayCity versus commodified nostalgia in NQ64 venues – and their difference from previous British models (Litherland, 2019); Santiago, Chile’s Entretenimiento Diana; and São Paulo’s surviving fliperamas (Perani & Régis, 2015; Vicente, 2024) as case studies of where historical game periods collapse historic tech, modern space, and community-driven needs into one, laminated assemblage (Smith & Prior, 2020).

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Composing the field: A layered soundtrack of videogame history

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Keywords: *Soundtracks, Sound, Music, Chiptune, Procedural music, Culture*

Abstract

Since the dawn of digital gaming, sound and music have been an important aspect shaping gameplay and game cultures (Rietveld & Carbone, 2017). From the ways in which the limited sound affordances offered by early machines punctuated gameplay (Lerner, 2013; McAlpine, 2017), to the rise of licensed music as soundtracks (Cavanagh, 2020; Millea, 2024), to the development of interactive game soundscapes/soundtracks (D’Errico, 2015), sound is pivotal for most gaming experiences. Yet, in game studies, sound has been, historically, the junior partner to its audiovisual sibling, the visual (Rauscher, 2013).

Game sound and music are at the intersection between hardware capabilities and creativity (McAlpine, 2017; Rietveld & Lemon, 2024; Thompson, 2026), being a relevant heuristic to understand how technical limitations can become a shaping (and not necessarily inhibiting) factor in creative practice (Leorke, 2012). Game sound and music have a high affective value to players (Koskela et al., 2025), for example, in the way that game music evokes nostalgia (Grež, forthcoming; Ivănescu, 2019) and engagement beyond gameplay (Böcker et al., 2021; Thompson, 2021). It often advocates for authenticity through in-game world coherence (Lind, 2023), or in how it relates – and often resignifies (Ivănescu, 2019) – gaming’s own past through procedural poetics and referentiality (Backe, 2025). The relationship between games and music often bleed into contemporary popular cultures, locally and globally (Ivănescu, 2021; Oliva, 2020; Perani & Régis, 2015), influencing contemporary musical genres (Gallagher, 2017; Márquez, 2014). With all these possibilities, our work aims at exploring how the study of game soundtracks can punctuate different periods in videogame histories. Here, we focus not only on the different techniques and creative practices adopted by composers – connected, of course, to hardware constraints and cultural conventions – but also how different soundtracks relate to different times and places, highlighting the close relationship between gaming and music scenes as important contemporary cultural domains.

In order to elaborate, we analyse three games that are representative of different periods regarding game soundtracks: the early 1990s and the intertextual elements between *Streets of Rage* (Sega, 1991) and electronic/dance music (Rietveld & Lemon, 2024), representing chiptunes (Rietveld & Lemon, 2024; Thompson, 2026); the early 2000s and the links between Y2K Tokyo-based culture, hip-hop, electronic music and *Jet Set Radio* (Blitworks, 2012 [2000]; Burnside, 2025; Montfort & Consalvo, 2012), representing the era of pre-recorded soundtracks (Fritsch, 2013); and *No Man’s Sky* (Hello Games, 2016) and its links with mid-2010s post/math rock, with the combination between pre-recorded formats as sources for generative/procedural

systems that expand this initial corpus, being effectively an interactive, procedural soundtrack (Plut & Pasquier, 2020).

In looking at these three different moments, our main aim is not to provide a naïve, linear reading of the history of games. Instead, our goal is to demonstrate how creative practices in game production are not only shaped by existing hardware affordances, but also by broader contemporary cultural elements as existing music scenes, permitting therefore a more layered reading of the history of videogames as a constitutive element of the recent history of popular cultures.

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Symbiotic Temporal Rupture: A Theoretical Framework for Informal Periodization through Digital Swarm Folding in Game History

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Keywords: *Game History, Informal Periodization, Symbiotic Temporal Rupture, Digital Swarms, Fan Historiography, Microhistory, Oral History, Social Network Analysis (SNA)*

Abstract

Official game historiography traditionally prioritizes hardware successions, software releases, and version updates to mark temporal epochs. However, persistent gaming communities also construct parallel and informal timelines around affectively intense events. While scholars have legitimized fan-produced historical knowledge, the field lacks a systematic theoretical framework explaining how specific inter-community incidents function as temporal hinges (Švelch & Krobová, 2016; Webber, 2016; Webber & Stevens, 2019). *Twitch Plays Pokémon* shows how viewers document livestream history, sustain archives, and build narratives around archived material (Emmanouloudis, 2022). Such incidents remain under-theorized in Chinese game cultures.

This research adapts Han's "digital swarm" as a decentralized, contingent online aggregation distinct from the classical public sphere (Han, 2017). It qualifies Han's account of swarms as agentless and memoryless: when swarms fold across existing communities, participants can develop shared identity, memory, and collective agency. From this extension, the paper develops "symbiotic temporal rupture" to theorize decentralized periodization. We argue that certain cultural incidents exceed ordinary communication or promotion and become ruptures in a game's social life through collective affective resonance. Such ruptures do not replace official periodization. They add affective and mnemonic layers to formal chronology and can heighten its historical salience. This study examines the virtual idol Eileen's *Wuthering Waves* livestream sequence between December 2025 and February 2026. Repeated streams and later circulation connected the official 3.1 release on 5 February to the 11 February livestream. The sequence catalyzed a temporary digital swarm folding between virtual idol fandom and the *Wuthering Waves* community. Fans returned to earlier posts, named milestones, circulated symbolic numbers, produced historical memes, and displayed blended affiliations. These interactions resembled a brief grassroots convergence among overlapping online tribes (Jenkins et al., 2013; Maffesoli, 1996). This folding generated an Eileen-centered memory site and made the official release and livestream mutually reinforcing temporal anchors.

To operationalize the framework, the research employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative discourse analysis with computational data science. It uses microhistory and oral history to interpret grassroots narration (Ginzburg, 1989; Levi, 1991; Portelli, 1991, 2018). At the micro scale, MLLMs assist multimodal classification informed by meso-scale graph clustering (Li et al., 2025). At the meso scale, HITS,

centrality, and graph clustering help identify candidate intermediaries and interpretive communities (He et al., 2024). At the macro scale, cross-platform SNA supports mapping field structure by comparing discourse density, semantic diversity, and narrative transmission efficiency (Shen & Karimi, 2016). Triangulation uses meme evidence, network nodes, and temporal sentiment to support sampling and interpretation rather than prove stable periodization. Blurred details, inconsistent memories, and uneven affect are treated as evidence of collective memory formation rather than noise.

Community memory is a persistent dimension of game history. Through affective resonance and cross-community interaction, participants co-author the lived past of digital game-spaces without displacing official chronology. The framework explains how emotional fragments, shared memories, and digital swarm folding add social and mnemonic layers to formal timelines. It conceptualizes the game as a negotiated and layered social landscape and offers a situated approach to game historiography.

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Pac-Man Politics: Grassroots Governance and the Video Arcade Bans of the early 1980s

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Keywords: *Atari, Pac-Man, Arcade Games, Controversy, Legislation*

Abstract

The "Pac Mania" era from 1981 to 1983 was a tumultuous time in video game history. The coin-op arcade game industry was booming, new arcade cabinets popped up across the United States, and video game characters like Pac-Man entered the popular culture through merchandise, music, and Saturday morning cartoons. At the same time, small-town political actors pushed for legal restrictions to protect youths from the perceived dangers of arcades as havens for truancy, delinquency, and illicit drug use. The mass media outlets elevated these local stories to national prominence with sensational newspaper articles and television news segments from coast to coast. The arcade game debate seemed to grip the nation but quietly ended after two years when the arcade boom cooled.

Late in 1980, *Pac-Man* (Namco) arrived in North American arcades and by the next summer, the country was swept up in *Pac-Man* fever. Soon, *Pac-Man* seemed to be everywhere: shopping malls, laundromats, pizza parlors, newspapers, record stores, and television screens ('Pac-Man fever' 1982; Cobb 1982; Goodman 1983). The yellow protagonist with an insatiable appetite became an iconic symbol for both the video game industry and the excesses of consumerism. To many, he was a cute and friendly diversion for players of any age or gender (Lade 1981). To others, he was the Pied Piper of videoland, luring children to dens of iniquity, stealing their lunch money, and robbing their free will (Fink 1982; Westarp 1982).

Thousands of video arcades opened as many new operators entered the booming business. Grassroots movements in disparate communities rose up to fight the video invasion with small-town politics. Where state and federal authorities were slow to act, small political groups acted to restrict video games at the local level. These groups enacted legislation to curb the arcade business and restrict young peoples' access to video games (Mann 1981; Rogers 1982; Dobb 1983; Fine 1983; Goroff 1984). Detractors saw these laws as age-based discrimination, robbing young people of their rights (Tilley 1981; Hickey 1982).

Video game news coverage caught the public's attention with lurid illustrations of *Pac-Man* devouring brains ('Pacman ilk nips surgeon general' 1982), children (McCormack 1982), or the city of Boston (Young and Rather 1982). A recurring cast of media-darling crusaders provided juicy sound bites of their evolving anti-video game rhetoric and unsubstantiated accusations that they cause violent tendencies, dehumanization, and inhibited social development (Cook 1982; Quinlan 1982). Much of this anti-game rhetoric is still heard to this day. Professionals who worked in or covered the game

industry mobilized their own small-town efforts to restrict the spread of further legislation. Atari invested heavily in a community outreach campaign, enlisting game distributors to speak to concerned citizens in town hall formats (Bucki 1982). Video game magazine journalists educated their readers with talking points to counter calls for game legislation in their own communities ('Stand up for video games!' 1982; Tilley 1983).

Soon, the boom times turned to bust as the coin-op business contracted (Smith 1983) and anti-game legislation disappeared from the headlines. This presentation serves as a detailed history of the people, events, media outlets, and strategies that shaped game legislation during this time. It focuses on three anti-arcade legislation "battlegrounds" that drew a majority of media coverage: Mesquite, Texas (Applebome 1982); Centereach, New York (Smith 1981); and Marshfield, Massachusetts (Clendinen 1983). These three communities were closely observed by the coin-op industry and local legislators elsewhere as they served as bellwether examples that could influence legislation in other parts of the country (Kerr 1982; Shaw 1983). It concludes with the long-lasting effects of the debate and legislation from the Pac Mania era.

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Islamic Art in Museums Through the Lense of Videogames

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Abstract

In recent decades, videogames have increasingly gained recognition as a valid field of academic study, reflecting the popular culture and creative imagination of the periods in which they are produced. Much like other media who reflect pop-culture of the time such as cinema or comic books, videogames function as so called cultural artefacts. They record and reinterpret history in a broader cultural sense. At the same time, museums have long played a crucial role in shaping public understanding of historical periods through the objects they collect and display (Pearce, 2003). Within this context, “Islamic Art” has become an established term in museum practice and collecting traditions, referring broadly to artistic production in regions historically under Islamic rule. Although the scholarly definition of Islamic art remains subject to ongoing debate, museums and collectors have contributed significantly to shaping a widely recognisable public understanding of this category (discussed in Junod et al., 2012).

While museums influence public perceptions of historical and artistic traditions, videogames increasingly contribute, with their own atypical learning mechanics, such perceptions. However, little, if any attention has been given to the niche subject of digital representations of museum environments in gaming. It remains unclear whether these representations reflect established museum narratives of Islamic art or whether they reproduce simplified, orientalist, or historically inaccurate visual references.

This paper examines how Islamic art is represented in museum environments that exist in videogames. It seeks to explore whether the presence of Islamic art objects in these digital contexts contributes to shaping the public perception of what constitutes Islamic art within a museum setting. By focusing on objects presented as museum exhibits within videogames, the study aims to assess the degree to which these representations correspond to concepts in real museum collections.

The research draws upon the project “Museums in Popular Videogames”, developed at the Museology Laboratory of the Ionian University in Corfu. The project has compiled a corpus of museum representations appearing in videogames (consoles and PCs) published between 1982 and 2022, identifying 233 videogame titles and 339 museum spaces. From this dataset, ten representative examples of objects identifiable as Islamic art have been selected. These objects are analysed through identification and visual comparison with real, references to real, or realistic museum artefacts, focusing on their form, display context, and visual characteristics.

The analysis demonstrates that representations of Islamic art within museum environments of videogame are rare. These representations often rely on visually distinctive forms that allow players to identify them as museum artefacts potentially connected to Islamic artistic traditions.

Islamic art remains underrepresented in museums within videogames, in comparison with other historic period artifacts digitally exhibited. Its presence nevertheless reflects a relatively stable and recognisable concept derived from museum collecting practice. Videogames thus reproduce and reinforce established perceptions of Islamic art rather than significantly redefining them. The study suggests that videogames could potentially function as a complementary medium through which museum narratives and categories of art history are transmitted to broader audiences.

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Teaching WWII with Games: Ludic Periodisation, National Memory, and the Challenges of Teaching History with Games

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Keywords: *WWII games, History teaching, Historical games, Historical narratives, Periodisation, Epoch-making*

Abstract

WWII remains one of the most intensively mediatised pasts, with globally circulating videogames, especially major shooters and strategy franchises such as *Call of Duty: WWII* (2017) and *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002), shaping popular understandings of the period. It can be problematic if learners encounter these influential titles before formal historical study because such games stabilise particular visions of the war that emphasise combat spectacle and moral binaries. This highly complex media ecology informs ongoing debates about whether and how digital games can be responsibly mobilised in the classroom for historical learning around specific periods (Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2004; Schut 2007; Brown 2008; Allison 2010; Wainwright 2014; Elliott 2020; Olsson 2023). This paper interrogates the pedagogical and historiographical implications of teaching WWII through digital games by theorising videogames as periodising media that contribute to the formation of historical discourses.

My study reads videogames as producers of popular historiography whose audiovisual regimes, narrative structures, and procedural models configure beginnings, middles, and aftermaths, while also potentially distorting historical narratives (Uricchio 2005; Bogost 2007; Elliot and Kapell 2013; Wright 2022). Building on historical theory and memory studies (Koselleck 2004; Assmann 2011), it argues that many popular games, particularly FPS and spectacle oriented strategy games such as the ‘authentic’ *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* (2005) or the alternative-history game *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (2014), cohere an exportable ‘Good War’-periodisation: a delimited, morally Manichaeian combat epoch that narrows the experiential and temporal bandwidth through which players encounter the period (Chapman 2016; Pötzsch 2017). Such games privilege pivotal battles and heroic agency while marginalising *longue durée* processes of fascist social formation, complicity, persecution, and post-war reckoning, yet can still support in-class activities on meaning-making of historical periodisation and its contemporary effects. By contrast, culturally situated titles such as *Attentat 1942* (2017), *Through the Darkest of Times* (2020) or *Svoboda 1945: Liberation* (2021) enact an alternate periodisation that extends the war backwards into late Weimar and forward into denazification, focusing on everyday life, resistance, and the slow violence of Nazification. These design choices resonate with research on structural fascism and contested memory cultures (Assmann 2011; Chapman 2016; Camarda 2024), as such games model an epoch’s construction that renders the past legible to players.

The pedagogical intervention advanced here adopts design-aware historical thinking (McCall 2016; Kee 2014). In structured classroom juxtapositions of different titles, students analysed how each game makes the WWII epoch legible: how mechanics, interfaces, quest structures, and paratexts encode ideology; how omissions and emphases construct temporal horizons; and how regulatory and market forces shape what is shown and sayable (Uricchio 2005; de Freitas & Oliver 2006). This exercise was contextualised with information on German legal frameworks of WWII memory culture, especially the *Sozialadäquanzklausel*, which, since 2018, has permitted the display of unconstitutional symbols in games, enabling more documentary and memory-oriented approaches (Fromme & Unger 2012; Berndt 2023). The goal was not to privilege local games as inherently authentic but to use the friction between titles as contrasting historiographic machines that inform modelling literacy, periodisation awareness, and reflexive engagement with the politics of memory. These inflexions are treated as part of the broader paratextual environment that interacts with how periodisations are produced and addressed in classrooms.

Methodologically, the paper combines close ludonarrative analysis with reception and paratextual study across German and international contexts, integrating legal discourse and classroom practice. It does so by focusing on a case study from *[anonymous university]*, where WWII-themed videogames were used to teach this period in German L2 final-year modules in 2024–25 and 2025–26. The paper's contribution is thus twofold: firstly, it theorises game based 'epoch making' as a transnational yet contested process shaped by design conventions and pedagogical uptake, with regulation as a consequential but secondary mediator; secondly, it offers a transferable pedagogy for teaching WWII (also beyond German L2 classrooms) as a multi scalar, temporally open problem rather than a closed canon of battles.

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Asynchronous Times: Divergent Periodisations of Computing and Play in East and West Germany during the 1980s

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Keywords: *Periodisation, Asynchronous digital temporalities, Cold War technology transfer, Home computing*

Abstract

Periodisation in game and computing history is often narrated as if decades map neatly onto coherent technological ‘eras,’ yet even adjacent societies can inhabit markedly different digital temporalities within the same period. The divided Germanies of the 1980s offer a concentrated case for rethinking how periods are produced by political economy rather than passively ‘experienced’ as uniform time. In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), market-driven access to leisure electronics and global supply chains supported a rapid domestication of home computing in schools and households (Bösch 2018; Flury 2023). In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), centrally planned production, infrastructural scarcity, and state control shaped a different pace and texture of adoption, in which private computing expanded late and unevenly, and became legible to the state as both risk and resource (Collier 1989; Flury 2025).

This paper develops a comparative account of how divergent economic and political frameworks generate different periodisations of play and creative computing, focusing on policy regimes, hardware ecologies, software circulation, and computing as social practice. At the macro level, multilateral export controls (especially CoCom) structured the circulation of dual-use computing technologies and intensified the politics of ‘technology transfer during the Cold War’ (Bertsch 1988; Schmitt 2019). These restrictions did not simply ‘delay’ eastern adoption but produced distinct temporal orders of technological possibility, in which access, legitimacy, and risk were unevenly distributed across the Iron Curtain (Henshaw 1993; Schmitt 2022). Within the socialist bloc, ComeCon’s attempts at coordinated technological development further shaped what counted as feasible, modern, and prioritised infrastructure (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998; Popov and Kochetkova 2024).

At the level of hardware, the FRG’s consumer market supported uptake of globally dominant platforms and a dense ecology of learning via specialist magazines and public–private educational initiatives (Bösch 2018; Flury 2023). In the GDR, by contrast, limited output from state producers such as Robotron, combined with affordability constraints, meant that private home computing frequently depended on informal acquisition routes (smuggled devices, grey markets, and improvised builds) alongside club-based access (Stillich 2009; Flury 2025). Software cultures sharpened these asynchronous timelines: West German computing operated within stricter copyright and commercial regimes (Göttlich 2007; Albert and Erdogan 2022), while the GDR’s different legal and economic conditions facilitated extensive copying, adaptation, and grassroots programming, including clones of Western games and

locally tailored applications (Schröder 2010; Flury 2025). Public-facing arcade play remained limited and ideologically managed, exemplified by the GDR's Poly-Play machine (Meyer 2019; Zirpins 2014).

The paper's main contribution is conceptual: the German case demonstrates that period labels such as 'the home computer era' or 'the 1980s digital turn' risk flattening the unevenness of historical time. Even within a small geographical and cultural space, different economic structures, regulatory regimes, and surveillance infrastructures generated divergent sequences of access, practice, and meaning, producing multiple coexisting '1980s' rather than a single linear decade of digital change (Swalwell 2021; Flury 2025). Treating these divergences as constitutive rather than exceptional reframes periodisation itself as an object of inquiry: periods emerge from infrastructures and governance as much as from devices, and they synchronise some actors while desynchronising others, shaping what 'contemporaneity' meant for players, hobbyists, clubs, and institutions on either side of the Wall (Albert and Erdogan 2022; Schmitt 2019).

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Did Achilles dream of cyber Troy? The Classical Greek and Roman narration in *Cyberpunk 2077*

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Keywords: *Cyberpunk 2077*, Classics, Classical receptions

Abstract

At first glance, it is not easy to connect the classical Greek and Roman antiquity with the cyberpunk genre. However, in CD Projekt RED's renowned game *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt RED, 2020), players occasionally identify links between Greek and Roman cultures and the game's main plot. The storyline of *Cyberpunk 2077* was rephrased from the Table role-playing game *Cyberpunk* (Pondsmith, 1988) and was heavily influenced by Philip Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 2012) and its movie adaptation, *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982). All of these references are set in a futuristic, dystopian cyberpunk context.

Within the game, there are three distinct classical references. The first is the opening paragraph of *Life of Alexander* in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (Plutarch, 1989). The second is the discussion between Achilles and his mother, Thetis, in *The Iliad* (Homer, 1990) Volume IX, which resonates with a famous sentence in the game: 'Would you rather live in peace as Mr Nobody, or go down for all times in a blaze of glory?' (CD Projekt RED, 2020). The third is the question from Alcinous, ruler of the Phaiacians, to Odysseus, when Odysseus was crying upon hearing the stories of the Trojan Wars in *The Odyssey* (Homer, 1999) Volume VIII. The imagery of 'home' transcends the game's primary narrative dichotomy of 'Mr. Nobody' versus 'a blaze of history', bringing the game to a definitive conclusion in its 'demon' ending. Throughout *Cyberpunk 2077*, no explicit classical imagery appears, yet its narrative logic closely follows themes central to classical discourse.

Previous research on *Cyberpunk 2077* focuses on its concepts from a criminological perspective (Steele, 2023), the racial and border politics academic field (Hernandez, 2024), or enchanted tarot reading (Moyzhes and Sebag, 2025). Recently, there has also been research on Christianity within the game (Welto, 2025), which depicts the biblical narration in the game plots in detail. However, the classical narrative in *Cyberpunk 2077* has not been discussed explicatedly in academia to date. This research will be based on previous classical researchers in digital games, such as Christian Rollinger (Rollinger, 2020), Ross Clare's research (Clare, 2021) on the sci-fi style classical game *Salammbô: Battle for Carthage* (Cryo Interactive, 2003), and the combined research on mythology and games by Dom Ford (2025) to propose my analysis.

This article proposes that *Cyberpunk 2077* uses classical references to establish a dramatic plot, focusing on the question of whether life should be marvellous but short, or ordinary but safe. It discusses the collaboration with megacorporations and the values of friends, families and personal principles. It also proposes a research

framework that classical reception studies could focus on the modern receptions of the classical elements, and on the usage of classical elements in creating transferable game narration backgrounds in a time period different from classical antiquity.

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Redefinition of Chinese Game Periodisation: A Perspective from Cloned Chips

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Keywords: *Chinese game history, Grey market, Hardware generations*

Abstract

In 1990, while the global video game industry officially transitioned to the 16-bit generation with the release of the Super Famicom, a parallel technological shift in Taiwan established an alternative historical trajectory for gaming in mainland China. Engineers at the United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC) successfully reverse-engineered the Nintendo Famicom's core microprocessors, the 6502-based CPU and the Picture Processing Unit (PPU), [1]producing the unauthorized UA6527 and UA6528 chips.[2] By catalyzing the production, consumption, and localization of home consoles in mainland China, this breakthrough demonstrates that the grey market is not merely a boundary of legal infringement, but a historical reality co-constructed by technological and social forces.

This paper argues that the emergence of reverse-engineered chips, as a part of the grey market, serves as a definitive periodisation marker for Chinese game history.[3] First, these UMC chips possessed unique technological affordances that reshaped the regional market. On the one hand, they were inexpensive to mass-produce, providing the hardware foundation for the low-cost Famiclone business model. On the other hand, UMC's reverse-engineered chips replicated the Famicom's open, lock-free hardware architecture. Because the hardware reproduction occurred outside Nintendo's legal jurisdiction and licensing regime, it transformed a commercially closed ecosystem into a decentralized, open-source platform,[4] which enabled the massive proliferation of pirated, localized homebrew software and hardware such as the popular educational computer, Xuexiji.[5]

Second, due to technical inaccuracies or patent evasion during the cloning of the audio processing unit, the sound output differed significantly from the original Ricoh hardware. This produced a distinctively harsher, overdriven audio profile, a technical discrepancy that ultimately forged the unique sensory memory for a generation of Chinese players.[6] Finally, the dissemination of these chips was inextricably linked to grey market networks facilitated by specific geopolitical conditions. Driven by cross-strait trade embargoes in the early 1990s, millions of cloned chips were smuggled via Hong Kong into manufacturing hubs like Shenzhen

There, these chips were integrated with low-cost keyboards and plastic shells to emerge as Xuexiji. The creation of the Xuexiji was a strategic socio-technical adaptation: by disguising gaming hardware as learning tools[7], Chinese firms navigated the severe societal stigma of video games as "electronic heroin" and negotiated parental

acceptance. This hybrid device stands as a testament to how hardware and software grey markets co-constructed the material reality of China's gaming history.

Based on this historical case, this study proposes a three-fold redefinition of gaming epochs. First, it decenters monolithic corporate timelines, shifting the power of periodisation from monopolistic platform holders to decentralized supply chains. Second, it reorients the material focus of hardware history. Rather than anchoring eras exclusively to branded consoles, it argues that the micro-components—the raw silicon that changes a medium's actual geographical reach—should also be examined by scholars. Finally, it positions the grey market not merely as a site of copyright infringement, but as a generative force that organically establishes its own distinct technological and cultural epochs.

[1] On the Ricoh 2A03 and 2C02 as the defining silicon of the Famicom architecture, see Altice, *I Am Error*, chapters 2 and 3.

[2] On the historical fact of the production of UMC chips, see *Nintendo Co. Ltd. v Centronics Systems Pty. Ltd.*, VG 359/1990 (Federal Court of Australia, Sweeney J, 1990); affirmed [1994] HCA 27. Technical findings summarized in Paul Sugden, "The Circuit Layouts Act 1989 Has Teeth," *Computers & Law*, no. 22 (1994): 28–31.

[3] On the main game periodization literature, see Mark J. P. Wolf, ed., *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation and Beyond* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), Part III ("The Industry Rebounds, 1985–1994") and Chapter 20 ("A New Generation of Home Video Game Systems").

[4] On piracy as generative infrastructure rather than mere reproduction, see Brian Larkin, "Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 289–314.

[5] The thirty-million figure appears in, among others, "Sanshi nian qian de shanzhai hongbai ji Xiaobawang" 30 年前的山寨红白机小霸王, *Sina Finance*, September 11, 2023, <https://finance.sina.cn/2023-09-11/detail-imzmxhxm9306283.d.html>; "Xiaobawang de yisheng" 小霸王的一生, *The Paper*, November 26, 2020.

[6] On the Ricoh 2A03 audio hardware specification, see NesDev Wiki, "APU Pulse," https://www.nesdev.org/wiki/APU_Pulse.

[7] The 1993 Paishou Ge campaign and the 1994 Jackie Chan campaign served as two distinct CCTV advertisements, representing successive stages of Xuexiji's marketing strategy. See "Gaobie 80 hou qingchun," *iFanr*, May 13, 2019, and "Tongnian jiyi Xiaobawang 'zou xia shentan'" 童年记忆小霸王"走下神坛", *Tencent News*, November 9, 2020.

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End of an Era: Analysing the Lifetime of Games-as-a-Service Through a Historical Lens

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Keywords: *Games as a service, Live service games, Game preservation, Game histories, Dead games*

Abstract

Over the past decade, the gaming industry has become increasingly dominated by live-service games. Games-as-a-service (GaaS) are games which – contrary to many older games which existed as fixed and complete products – are being consistently updated and changed; being viewed as assets rather than mere products (Bernevega & Gekker, 2022). This is a shift which is reflective of the increasingly platformised state of the gaming industry (Nieborg, et. al., 2020). Much has been written about this era of GaaS games, including work examining audience perspectives on GaaS games (Vaudour & Heinze, 2020), the monetisation of the GaaS model (Joseph, 2021), and the justifications developers provide for ceasing to support GaaS (Dubois & Chalk, 2025). Indeed, the cessation of support for live-service games (often called “sunsetting”) is a common occurrence and one which raises questions about the sustainability of this current era of the industry. But while research exists investigating how these games may be preserved (Manning & May, 2024), there remains little looking at the final period of the GaaS game’s lifespan.

This abstract examines these games by applying a historical framework not to the era of the broader games industry which they have defined, but to the games themselves; if these GaaS are “living games”, then they can be understood as having a lifespan and a history of their own which contains multiple historical periods. The research focuses on the final period(s) of the live-service game’s lifespan, ranging from the announcement of end of service to the closure of these game services. By examining historical data of 500 previously sunset GaaS games, this research shows what this period of a GaaS game’s lifespan looks like, revealing that less than a half dozen of these games ended service in a state that left all content playable, while roughly 2/3rds of the games were rendered completely unplayable through legal means. Meanwhile, the sunsetting of these games was found to rarely be accompanied by any form of compensation for the players; over half the games being sunset made no mention of any reparations for the termination of service. Some games did however provide some form of reparations via disabling in-game purchases, offering refunds for recent purchases, or rebalancing the in-game economy or gameplay systems to be more rewarding than previous periods of the game’s lifespan. This research also reiterates the complications involved in preserving these games; while a consumer rights approach to preserving these games has gained traction in the public eye, it often overlooks the complexities that the GaaS model presents; these games are not products, rather they are platforms or assets. This is an issue highlighted by examining these games through a historical framework, which draws attention to the fact that

sunsetting can sometimes change these games in significant ways – even beyond the obvious shutting down of key features. This analysis expands the academic understanding of how GaaS games should be examined, foregrounding methods which treat them as games with a unique history and lifespan, not as static products.

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Two Layers of Time: Periodising the History of Chinese Gaming through Regulation, Shadow Infrastructures and Gamers' Practices (2000–2020)

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Keywords: *Chinese gaming, Periodisation, Regional periods, Players, Games culture*

Abstract

Conventional periodisations of video game history often take hardware generations or major platform transitions as their organising principle. In mainland China, that approach obscures a foundational early-twenty-first-century condition: state policy constrained the legal mass-market development of console gaming for over a decade, even as PC and online games proliferated through internet cafes and home computers, and later through smartphones (Hong & Huang, 2005; Liao, 2016). Console-centric chronologies therefore may misread what was mainstream, where play happened, and how monetisation and governance co-evolved in Chinese gaming (Chew, 2019). This paper argues that Chinese game history from 2000 to 2020 is best periodised through two interacting layers, regulation and shadow infrastructures, rather than a single industry timeline. The central research question is: how did regulation and shadow infrastructures jointly produce distinct, but interacting, temporal boundaries for the Chinese game industry and gamers' everyday practices between 2000 and 2020?

Drawing on Field Theory (Benson, 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), the paper proposes a two-layer periodisation and treats the regulated and shadow lines as partially overlapping subfields with distinct rules of legitimation, forms of capital, and dominant agents. The first line is regulated and visible, shaped by licensing, content review, and platformisation. From early-2000s constraints on the legal console market to operator-run online games and portals tied to major internet services, and later app-store ecosystems in which approval numbers and distribution partnerships structure what becomes officially playable. By 2015, consoles re-entered the legal market under new regulatory conditions. The second line is shadowed but enduring, organised through grey-market hardware, piracy, fan translation, the popularity of Steam, and the material spaces of play such as internet cafes (Liao, 2016; Szablewicz, 2020). This path, operating as a hidden thread, is highly relevant to the everyday gaming practices of Chinese players. The two lines are related but not equivalent: some gamers travel between them, while others remain largely confined to one side. The analysis further asks how players' strategies, mobilising economic resources, cultural capital, and social capital, enabled movement across these subfields, and how such movement (and its limits) reorganised period boundaries over time.

The analysis operationalises this question by mapping turning points that register in both layers. These include early-2000s crackdowns and licensing regimes around internet access venues; the 2007 anti-addiction and real-name experiments for online games; the mid-2010s easing of the console ban (which changed what official console

play could mean without eliminating grey-market access); and the late-2010s restructuring and delays in game approvals that affected release rhythms and platform strategies. Reading these events through two layers allows periods to be defined by legality, distribution channels, and everyday access, not only by technologies.

Methodologically, the project, as an ongoing study, combines public documentary evidence (laws and administrative notices, corporate filings, policy interpretation documents, market research summaries, and archived platform announcements) with oral-history interviews with players. Interviews will be sampled across cohorts to capture variation in cost, enforcement, and cultural legitimacy. Oral histories will be analysed as evidence of how players themselves periodise change and will be triangulated against documentary timelines to identify similarities and differences between policy events, industrial narratives, and the ‘gaming eras’ experienced by players.

By foregrounding two levels of periodisation, the paper makes Chinese gaming historically legible and offers a framework for writing Chinese game history that is comparable to global chronologies. It also demonstrates how industry period markers and player period markers intersect yet diverge, producing a historically specific double timeline of play, access, and legitimacy within China for game history.

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Epochs of Intimacy: Exploring the History of Video Game Romance

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Keywords: *Romance, Narrative design, Game design, Game mechanics, Monetization, Genre*

Abstract

This project explores the evolution of video game romance, an area of gameplay and design gaining increasing interest (Brierly-Beare, 2025). While romance mechanics and narratives initially emerged as a strategy to attract female audiences (Lei et al., 2024), their evolution reflects broader shifts in game design, technology, and cultural attitudes. The structure of romance changes over time, alongside variations in understandings and implementations of game mechanics (Ntelia, 2020), player agency (Muriel & Crawford, 2020), and what romance should look like and be experienced as. To explore how video game romance has shifted over time, this qualitative project considers historically recorded data from video game records posted online, fandom wikis, online player discussions, and direct gameplay.

Broadly, there have been six major epochs and turning points related to styles of video game romance and romantic game design, which notably extend and overlap. This begins in the early 1990s, with visual novels and otome style romance. These games centered the idea of romance as related to feminine interests and possible female audiences, exploring romance in the context of a female protagonist with various male romantic options. While this format continues in many games today, by the late 1990s, romance began to shift toward an integrated part of broader gameplay, with the BioWare model of romance emerging as part of role-playing games. In these cases, games offered romance to male or female player characters, with varying degrees of possibility for same-sex romance.

By the mid- to late-2010s, romance became viewed as a given in games where players embody a character exploring a deep narrative, perhaps due to the increasing emphasis on emotional engagement and cinematic-style game content (Passos et al., 2023). By the late-2010s, we also see a normalization of playersexual romance models (Tomlinson, 2024) in addition to the possibility of queer content related to in-game romance and representation among companions (Shaw & Friesem, 2016; Tomlinson, 2024) alongside a movement toward mobile romantic games and monetization models. In this latter case, players now find themselves at odds with many companies, with romantic content and character relationships frequently paywalled. Finally, in the early- to mid-2020s, as artificial intelligence ramps up, we see a movement toward an interest in AI romance, combined with player resistance to these possibilities. While some are embracing what they see as increased agency in their romantic stories, others focus on what they feel is a cheapening of content, particularly in mobile romance stories.

Romance can be tracked over time as both a genre and a mechanic. This project highlights these shifts as they are shaped by technological and narrative trends in addition to changes in culture, representation, and the treatment of player agency. Ultimately, this study proposes that the history of video game romance offers a unique lens for understanding the eras of games, challenging conventional periodization, highlighting the importance of understanding genre-specific shifts and experiences, and inviting new methods and perspectives for exploring gaming's historical epochs.

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Hallucinatory Statecraft: Cold War Conspiracies in Call of Duty: Black Ops

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Keywords: *Cold War, Conspiracy Theories, Liminality, Containment, Archive*

Abstract

This paper presents Call of Duty: Black Ops as a nexus between social theory and media crafted during the period of the Cold War. The Cold War is noted as much for its ambiguous, ambivalent eschatology as the invention of videogames. Through applying concepts of ‘containment’ from Derrida (1984), Kennan (1991) and Horvath and Szakoczi (2020), the series – and specifically Black Ops: Cold War – reveals the crisis of knowledge that defined the late 20th century, a spectre that continues to haunt the second quarter of the 21st.

This emerges from Cold War’s timeshifting mechanics, allohistorical speculation and memory manipulation, wrapped in a penchant for ‘hallucinatory statecraft’ with references to MKULTRA mind control programmes, flashbacks and flashforwards, bad trips and memory manipulation, so the game meanders to the question that Black Ops ultimately poses: what if conspiracy theories are real?

The series’ recursive timelines and paranoid saturated plots foreground the crisis of verification that shaped Cold War statecraft (Rossbach 1999). In Black Ops and Black Ops II, the implied involvement of CIA operative Alex Mason in the assassination of President Kennedy questions the veracity of the events of that day and undermines the player’s own ontological security by positioning the player in scenarios where counterfactual histories appear ontologically credible (Seiwald 2020). The player becomes the conduit through which the game’s systems elasticate the boundaries between narrative, agency, and state secrecy: the ‘hallucinatory statecraft’ of the title.

Black Ops: Cold War (2020) telegraphs this ambiguity, examining the transformation of the archive at the cusp of the digital age. Its Berlin safehouse, with darkrooms, floppy disks, early computers, and redacted documents, is instructive of the archive in transition and deterioration. Berlin itself - actually and figuratively - is a partitioned metropolis, a city state marshalled between the Allied powers of UK, US and France to the west and the Soviet Union to the east. Ensnared within Eastern Germany, Berlin is the quintessential nation state as liminal space (Horvath and Szakolzai 2020): divided and subdivided, it is a location for double / triple agents, subterfuge and espionage.

Microchips and magnetic media both intensified the production and storage of intelligence and simultaneously ensured its leakage and misappropriation, a phenomenon equally common to the information flooding of redacted files in the 2020s. As the archive swells in prevalence its accordant unaccountability mirrors its own recording and recoding of equally deniable black operations, revealing Derrida’s

(1984) paradox of the archive as a concurrent technology of preservation and a structure threatened with erasure, both through the threat of nuclear war and the archive's lack of containment (Kennan 1991).

Simultaneously, the series foregrounds hallucinatory statecraft through repeated invocations of MKULTRA-style conditioning, trigger phrases, and false-memory implantation. The player character's Bell's psychic peeling (hence the double-use of the verb) in *Cold War*, and Harrow's harrowed childhood in *Black Ops 6*, reveal the anthropological trick of the sovereign's ability to both demand and survive death risk (Bataille 1989). Shady figures such as Adler sit atop the doublespeak and manipulation, 'living on' to reap semiotic and symbolic profit from the sacrifices of their subordinates, achieving moral authority by surviving the very violence they perpetuate.

Therefore, *Black Ops* both depicts the violations of mind control and uncovers the reversed logic that authorizes hallucinatory states to engineer consciousness in the name of existential security, which is paradoxically an impossible state in the counterfactual, nuclear age, where the enemy is war itself.

By collapsing temporal boundaries, weaponising uncertainty, and foregrounding the unstable archive, *Black Ops: Cold War* wraps the player in a paranoid logic where the future is folded into the present and the past is subject to revision and reversion. The atomic exchange that Derrida and other theorists of the nuclear age theorised did not emerge from the period of the Cold War, yet the warped effects of its black ops continues to unravel long after its end.

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Game Industry Timeline: What to put on it?

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Keywords: *Danish game industry, Timeline, Method, Life history interviews, Corporate histories, Chronology, Chronography, Sequence, Causality, Linear metaphor of time, Alternate histories*

Abstract

In 2022, Europe prioritized strengthening video games' cultural and creative dimensions for 2023–2026. A few years later, Denmark launched Europe's first game institute to support original Danish games and called it a “new heyday” for the industry (Games Denmark 2024). European and Scandinavian game development thrives through distinct national frameworks, politics, and communities, backed by art funding, education, and grassroots efforts (e.g. Jørgensen, Sandqvist and Sotamaa 2015). Such support has emerged at pivotal moments across decades in policies, industry, and communities (O'Brien 2023). Amid rapid local and global changes, documenting industry history enables learning from the past and strengthens collective identity among game makers.

This paper outlines methods for creating the first timeline of the Danish game industry context. It discusses opportunities and challenges in identifying key events and involving stakeholders. The timeline documents formative policies and entities shaping commerce, education, and artistry over 25 years, up to recent institutionalization, aiming to understand their impact.

Rosenberg and Grafton (2010) note that “our idea of time is so wrapped up with the metaphor of the line that taking them apart seems virtually impossible” (13), yet “these timelines are not without history themselves” (10). Timelines identify sequences as a basis for causal relations, but sequence alone does not prove causality (cf. Lunteren 2019). Game industry research is generally marked by the struggle of navigating and challenging biases from relying on anecdotal accounts from the developers themselves and navigating company practices of trade secrecy and workplace promotion (O'Donnell 2014).

A timeline of the Danish game industry ecosystem, in our view, should not imply institutions manage games and people predictably. While risking “temporally simplified narratives,” it helps question skewed developer accounts (Kultima, Ojanen and Nylund 2024, 178). Our paper describes gathering alternative evidence from a variety of stakeholders. We share our journey in answering the questions: **What should go onto a timeline of the Danish game industry?** and **How to gather all that matters?**

From this chronology, we traced overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, public programs and private interests, highlighting timeline limitations for developing more sensitive industry data points. We gathered development condition-changing events

(e.g., laws/policies) to discuss ‘movements’ and ‘epochs’ (Fortun and Fortun 2023) collaboratively online and offline. Iterative co-design and ‘timeline interviews’ (Adriansen 2012) foregrounded a multitude of perspectives and made space for marginal voices. Parallel stories were included, recognizing no single “game industry” (Keogh 2023) but diverging histories of “who and why we are.”

Spanning just a few decades, the timeline further overlaps with individuals’ “lifelines” (Gramling and Carr 2004) as well as game studios’ corporate histories. Interviewing and co-designing with stakeholders emphasized this interdependence, rendering the timeline a living structure. Given the small size of the Danish industry, it is possible to engage people with notable personal involvement, unlike in game industry histories of Japan (Koyama 2023) or China (Nakamura and Wirman 2021). At this stage, the timeline offers no ‘historical explanations.’ Instead, it explores how institutional and communal changes serve as rhetorical devices and appeals to legitimacy (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) for individuals to act and justify, rather than dictate, industry direction.

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The Epic Turn: Scale, Transmediality, and Classicism in Online Gaming Culture

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Keywords: *Epic, Online gaming, Rhetoric, Scale, Transmedia, Antiquity, Classicism, MMORPG, MOBA, Battle royale, Gacha*

Abstract

During the opening ceremony of BlizzCon 2023, the creative director of World of Warcraft (2004) Chris Metzen, returning to his work on the game after a long hiatus, took to the stage to introduce the game's ongoing trilogy of expansions, the Worldsoul Saga: "All of these hooks and a hundred more, all cooking in the pot, started to reveal a storyline. Something epic. How epic? Real epic." Metzen delivers these lines with his signature gravitas and charisma. His live audience responds with raucous applause, in which fan nostalgia for his return is palpable. Metzen left a mark, not only through his contributions as one of the original designers and voice actors behind the Warcraft franchise, but indeed as one of the pioneering rhetoricians of online gaming culture. "Epic," an all-too-familiar expression on Metzen's tongue as he invokes it here once more, had a certain heyday in contemporary popular vernacular in the mid-2000s alongside the growth of internet culture and online gaming. Even now, the word continues to veer unstably across its literary, cinematic, and slang valences. But no matter its form, it seems that epic continues to maintain its potent, almost structuring, hold on the online gaming imagination.

This presentation takes on the conference's theme by proposing a distinct epoch in the history of online gaming: the medium's turn of the century internalization of epic as an ideological north star as it transitioned into the cultural mainstream. This process was catalyzed by concurrent transmedia flows—in particular, the rich visualizations of collective warfare found in cinematic blockbuster epics like *Gladiator* (2000), the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), *Troy* (2004), and others. But epic came to accrue a special meaning for online gaming at a moment of intense growth. Leveraged for its associations with established cultural forms, epic was a concise, rhetorically-charged, narrativizable premise that players and developers could fall back on to make legible, to themselves and to onlookers, the constellation of digital and in-person practices that were being thrust into the public spotlight. Commercial incentives, too, played a part: epic was one way to articulate the live service that developers were providing (i.e. maintaining a platform for collectively experiencing epic), which they were still discovering how to monetize (i.e. via subscription or free-to-play models) and market to increasingly global audiences.

This interpretive history I hope to present taps into my training as a games scholar as well as classicist, placing scholarship from game studies, media history, and classical reception in dialogue with an analytical survey of key online gaming genres: MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy XIV* (2013), MOBAs like *League*

of Legends (2009) and Dota 2 (2013), battle royales like Fortnite (2017) and Apex Legends (2019), and mobile gacha games like Genshin Impact (2020) and Honkai: Star Rail (2023). I aim to build on and update existing histories of online gaming like Graeme Kirkpatrick's *Computer Games and the Social Imaginary* (2013), Edward Castronova's *Synthetic Worlds* (2005), and T.L. Taylor's monographs on MMORPGs and esports (2006; 2012). Yet, where these works take the advent of computing as a starting point for their media histories, my inquiry extends much further back into the history of ideas to interrogate how and why it is that epic—a fluid concept rooted in antiquity—continues to figure into our contemporary visions for online gaming.

Even when understood narrowly as an oral and literary form in Greco-Roman antiquity, epic has been no stranger to regular transmediation—recognized already then as a repertoire of meaning to be conveniently redeployed in the production of sports, theatre, parody, the arena, and more. Studying the cultural mechanics of these transitions, I argue that epic's various reinventions had less to do with the genre's formal properties, and much more to do with its potential as a social template. For similar reasons, I propose that a playful strand of classicism now operates as a social interface within online gaming culture: with epic's thematic fixations with heroes, quests, empires, arenas, and gods structuring and encoding the interactions taking place online between players, between fans and developers, between new types of content creators and their new types of audiences.

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Why the Song Dynasty?: Genre, Play, and Historical Imagination in Chinese Wuxia MMORPGs

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Keywords: *Periodization, Chinese wuxia MMORPGs, Song Dynasty, Genre conventions, Historical imagination*

Abstract

This study investigates how historical imagination is shaped and stabilized as a recognizable, shareable “age of play” in Chinese wuxia MMORPGs, taking the recurring use of the Song Dynasty as a revealing case. Although previous scholarship has shown that games generate historical meaning through interactive systems (Chapman, 2013), the repeated appearance of the Song Dynasty across different titles raises a different question: what kind of Song past is being constructed through this repeated use? The study further asks how this imagined past interacts with the conventions of MMORPG and wuxia genres. And how, through this process, the Song Dynasty becomes a recognizable and reproducible “age of play.”

Theoretically, this study builds on scholarship on how games produce historical meaning. Games reorganize the past through rules and narrative structures into a playable historical form (Chapman, 2016), one that depends on the player’s structured effort to engage with the game world (Aarseth, 1997, 2004). In this sense, history in games can be understood as a participatory form of popular history (Chapman, 2019). Yet this scholarship explains how history becomes playable more than why the same dynasty recurs across titles and stabilizes as a shared historical imagination. To address this issue, this study draws on Symbolic Convergence Theory (Bormann, 1985) to examine how fantasy themes of the Song Dynasty and wuxia develop into fantasy chains and rhetorical visions. From this perspective, these imaginaries shape each other dialectically, stabilizing the Song as a recognizable “age of play.”

Methodologically, this study examines three Song-themed Chinese MMORPGs: Justice, Moonlight Blade, and Where Winds Meet. The data include main storylines, world-building texts, official narratives, and player discussions and creations from major community spaces. Using Fantasy Theme Analysis (Bormann, 1972, 1985), the study identifies recurring fantasy themes, analyzes their “setting–character–action” structure, and traces their development into fantasy chains and rhetorical visions.

Preliminary findings suggest that the representation of the Song Dynasty in Chinese wuxia MMORPGs is shaped by a dialectical relationship between historical period and genre. Here, genre works as a compound influence: wuxia as a thematic tradition and MMORPG as a formal type. Rather than reconstructing the dynasty as a fixed past (Chapman, 2016, 2019), these games foreground those aspects of the Song that support both wuxia imagination and MMORPG play, turning it into a historically recognizable yet playable world.

These games do not depict the Song Dynasty as a whole, but rather a selectively amplified Song jianghu. On the one hand, the Song is imagined through wuxia as a world of sects, martial relations, moral tension, and interplay between official order and the folk sphere. This image is shaped not only by historical reference, but also by earlier wuxia novels and broader literary and media traditions. On the other hand, MMORPG conventions configure the Song as a world suited to factions, organized social structures, and player action (Nitsche, 2008). Historically recognizable yet open to expansion, the Song Dynasty functions less as a closed past and more as an inhabitable, expandable wuxia world. Together, these two genre logics interact to produce a particular rhetorical vision of the dynasty.

Through discussion, reinterpretation, and secondary creation in community spaces, these recurring ideas converge into fantasy themes, develop into fantasy chains, and stabilize as rhetorical visions (Bormann, 1985). More broadly, this suggests that in games, dynasties and historical moments are not simply represented as pasts, but selectively shaped and stabilized into forms of history that are both recognizable and playable.

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Epochs within Epochs: Layered Periodization in the Formative Phase of Early Chinese Game Culture

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Keywords: *Game historiography, Periodization, Layered temporalities, Chinese game culture, Long 1990s*

Abstract

In recent years, decentering US- and Japan-centric narratives has become a key concern in game historiography (Swalwell 2021). Yet hardware generations, technological “revolutions,” industrial stages, and canonized “classics” continue to function as the dominant framework for periodizing game history (Donovan 2010; 王亚晖 2018; Kent 2021). This rupture-oriented model largely mirrors industry narratives and obscures regional variation.

This paper therefore asks how different regions produce distinct period markers, and within what broader historical formations digital games—whose history spans less than a century—can be situated.

Drawing on the Annales tradition of analyzing long and short durations in parallel, the paper suggests that game history need not follow a single rupture-driven chronology. Instead, multiple periodizations can coexist, allowing the history of digital games to be understood as one layer within broader historical processes.

Insights from global and techno-cultural history (Edgerton 2007; Conrad 2016) further show that debates over periodization have long grappled with uneven development and the tension between rupture and continuity, and have more recently turned to the material and environmental conditions shaping historical processes (Malm 2016; Parikka 2015). On this basis, the paper proposes a multi-layered model of periodization in which game histories are understood as composed of overlapping temporal layers—institutional, political-economic, and material—rather than structured by a single dominant timeline.

The second part applies this model to the formative phase of early Chinese game culture.

Firstly, it argues that this formative phase of Chinese gamer culture is better marked by the founding, flourishing, and decline of game print magazines—roughly 1994/1995 to around 2005—rather than by hardware generations (王洪喆 2025). This reflects a broader pattern across many Global South histories: games did not expand through stable hardware markets but entered public life through culturally engaged elites using established print media within regulated publishing systems. Only later did games become mass consumer products with broader player communities (Švelch 2018; Penix-Tadsen 2019).

Secondly, this magazine-based phase unfolded within the “Long 1990s” (c. 1992–2008), a phase of accelerated marketisation (张慧瑜 2025), linking game history directly to institutional transformation. Situating game culture within this policy environment foregrounds the market itself as infrastructure for post-industrial digital entertainment and clarifies the institutional conditions on which games depended (Švelch 2018; Sun 2024).

Thirdly, the Long 1990s also mark a decisive stage in China’s modernization. Placing this formative phase within this trajectory helps explain persistent moral controversies surrounding video games. Discourses such as “electronic opium” reflect longer tensions over imported technologies and cultural forms within China’s longer-term modernization process (Golub et al. 2008; 邓剑 2022).

Finally, at a broader material scale, this stage of China’s modernization was also marked by rapid growth in electricity production, urbanization, and integration into global manufacturing networks. Situating early game culture within these transformations highlights the energy systems and infrastructures underpinning digital entertainment and reconnects the history of “virtual” culture with its material and environmental foundations (Newman 2012).

Using the formative phase of early Chinese game culture as a case study, the paper shows how regional game histories can be situated within overlapping temporal layers—the Long 1990s, China’s modernization process, and broader material transformations. It makes two arguments. First, regional game histories call for context-specific period markers that are not necessarily tied to hardware generations or canonical game releases. Second, it proposes a multi-layered model of periodization that situates historically specific phases within overlapping temporal layers, thereby revealing the institutional and material conditions shaping digital games.

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Hobbyist Games History and Their Relation to Independent Games

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Keywords: *Hobbyist games, Indie, History, China*

Abstract

The history of hobbyist games is frequently treated as a “prehistory” of independent games (Parker, 2013, p. 3). However, since the term independent or indie has become increasingly unstable and over-determined (Garda & Grabarczyk, 2016), expanding across industrial, financial, aesthetic, creative, and discursive domains to the point that attempts to fix its meaning often prove analytically unproductive (Simon, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, hobbyist games and independent games are now, in many regional and cultural scenarios, referring to fundamentally different configurations of practice, infrastructure, and community. This study proposes a grounded examination of hobbyist games as a distinct subfield within game history, one that has long remained marginalized yet is crucial for understanding alternative modes of production, participation, and collective play.

Before “indie games” emerged as a stable category, alternative game production circulated under multiple labels, including amateur, enthusiast, fan-made, shareware, demoware, and freeware, among others. This history remains the most underdeveloped area in indie game studies (Parker, 2013, p. 3). In Japan, a parallel tradition has developed within the Doujin culture (Fiadotau, 2019; Pablos, 2024), with self-published distribution through informal networks, demonstrating how hobbyist production can establish long-term aesthetic coherence and community infrastructure without recognition from mainstream “industry”.

Distinguishing hobbyist games from independent games is not merely a terminological refinement but also a response to the substantive cultural practice divergence that has emerged between the two. By the late 2000s, hobbyist and independent games were no longer successive stages along a single trajectory, but two parallel yet asymmetrical cultural formations: hobbyist games typically exist through more niche forms, relying on small-scale communities with motivations rooted in experimentation, fan culture, or group identity. In contrast, although indie games still rhetorically emphasize autonomy, they have become increasingly entangled in the platform economy and funding structures. Meanwhile, hobbyist game practices have increasingly shifted toward a broader, more popularized set of media practices. This article argues that hobbyist games should not be understood as the “childhood” or “predecessor” of independent games. Instead, they should be recognized as continuously evolving cultural logics and structures, maintaining a complex relationship of divergent coexistence.

Although the distinction between hobbyist and indie games carries global significance, this article takes China as its point of departure because it exhibits a distinctive

historical rhythm. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, RPG Maker projects, Flash games, and visual novels became widely popular in China, preceding the localized dissemination of the indie concept. Communities such as 66RPG exemplified a collective creative culture based on shared identity, virtual world building, and collective play among amateurs (Author, 2026). When the indie concept gradually entered the Chinese context after 2008, it was quickly encoded by local industrial structures (Qiao, 2022). Initially, “indie” was often understood as “original,” used to distinguish non-pirated works from imitative products (Davies, 2024). However, with intensified capital investment and entrepreneurial discourse, “indie” became increasingly tied to identities such as entrepreneurship or venture capital, and its semantics shifted rapidly from creative autonomy to a market-oriented model of specific production. Meanwhile, the hobbyist game-making practices now persist more through UGC ecosystems, such as amateur communities, visual novel platforms, forum-based TRPG/CRPG games, and social media groups. This divergence enables a deeper understanding of the transformations that game production undergoes in cross-cultural transmission.

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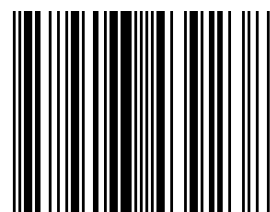
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