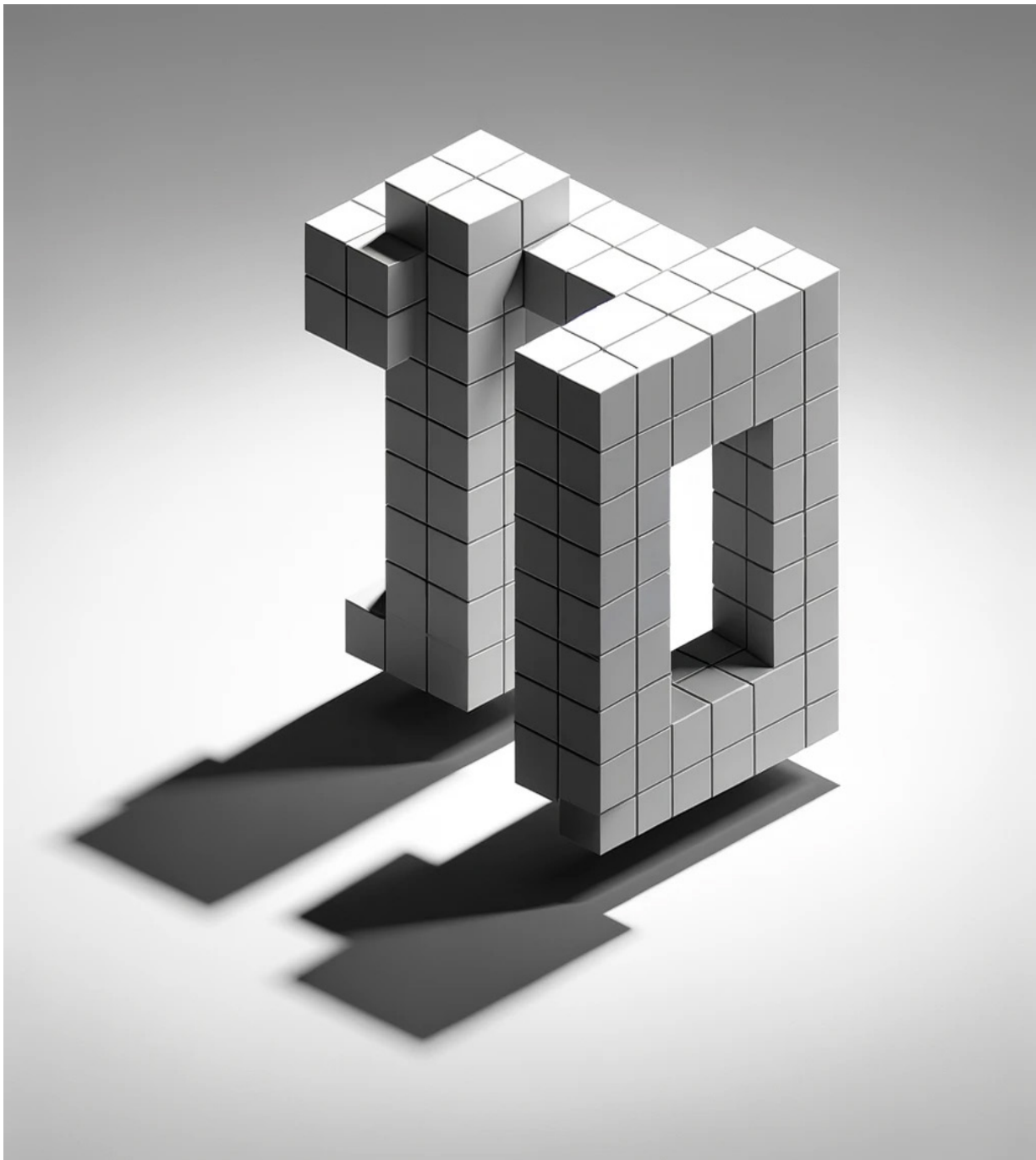


A DECADE IN GAMES STUDIES

Critical and reflexive interrogations on digital play and games research

Edited by Marco Benoît Carbone, Federico Giordano, Ivan Girina, Ilaria Mariani, Marco Teti





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Edited by M. Benoît Carbone, F. Giordano, I. Girina, I. Mariani, M. Teti

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Ten years of GAME – Games as Art, Media, Entertainment

With the present issue, *GAME* celebrates ten years of activity as an independent academic journal, one that is neither tied to a commercial publisher nor to a single institution. As a way of celebration, the journal will now be accepting submissions for rolling issues along with our traditional theme-based, monographic issues. This is also a chance to glance back at the history of the field of game studies, and of our journal's place in the broader research communities, over the course of the past decade.

GAME emerged in 2012 from an independent *milieu* of early-career researchers as a then-pioneering project. One of the very few journals that posited games as their core academic subject, it sought to inaugurate a dialogue between the then-rising international field of game studies and a focus on games research from more traditionally established disciplines, such as semiotics, film and media studies, and media archaeology, among others. *GAME*'s intellectual roots were situated in the disciplinary traditions of Italian universities, from which most of its Founding Members had graduated. Yet, while some of them would further pursue their academic careers in Italy, others would go on to embark on doctoral and professional experiences abroad. Therefore, from its inception, and up to the present time, the journal has been embracing a remarkably hybrid positionality and growingly polycentric stance. The diverse make-up of perspectives has been reflected in the variously situated views of games research hailing from distinct national contexts, as well as in the transnational trajectories of those who have driven the journal's activities and contributed with their articles. From the onset, *GAME* resisted a putative ludological "purism"—its full title, *Games, Art, Media and Entertainment*, promising to both cater to a then-nascent games studies field and encompass a much broader, interdisciplinary remit. The journal also suggested the possibility of overcoming an Anglocentric approach by publishing contributions in Italian (and, in principle, in all other languages), therefore promising to establish connections between diversely situated research communities. This flexibility has allowed the journal to occasionally and playfully navigate not just different languages, but different approaches, too, hailing from distinct or intersecting academic contexts.

At the same time, *GAME* opted for not relying on the support of commercial platforms or external publishers—entailing that the journal's onus would rest entirely on the motivated labour of an independent Editorial Team, as well as on the generous contributions of Authors and Reviewers. Not benefiting from any financial support has sometimes exerted a significant toll on its Editors. Still, this has also meant freedom, allowing the journal to maintain complete independence, unfettered by financial obligations and disentangled from the neoliberal logics of contemporary academic publishing and institutions.

Up until the present, we have pursued such an endeavour mostly through the relatively unusual format of theme-based calls. Over the span of a decade, and across the field of both games studies and interdisciplinary games research, this has allowed the Journal to offer focused insight into a variety of subjects. Our theme-based issues have looked at topics as diverse as gamification and ludic pervasiveness; spatial technologies and the aesthetics of space in games; play subcultures and cultural discourses around the medium; transmedia relationships between games, film and cinema; meta-games and design as self-reflexive practice; sonic and games studies intersections; accessibility and inclusive design; agency and the politics of being in games and digital media; and normativity and taboos in and around games. A survey of such topics may suggest that *GAME* has been playing along a series of developments in game studies as a growingly diversified field. The journal has explored approaches developing from semiotic, ontological, and phenomenological frameworks; embraced the growing poststructuralist turn of games studies; addressed key perspectives such as feminist and queer theory; opened up to subcultural theory and reflections on labour and industrial infrastructures; and expanded its remit into fields of intersection between games and film studies, musicology, education, design, philosophy, and media archaeologies. A defining feature of the journal, interdisciplinarity has driven *GAME* to develop a distinctively hybrid stance. The variety of perspectives and voices hosted by our theme-based issues are testimony to some of the changes, turns, critical rifts and folds that have taken place during the past decade in the fields of games research.

Today, as a project crafted by a constitutively transnational group, the Journal aims to further build on the diversity and independence that have defined its work since its inception and that we aim to cultivate by providing an independent platform that we hope to devote to scholars and scholarly communities around the globe, in a multicultural and multidisciplinary perspective. In light of these reflections, *GAME* hereby inaugurates a two-track publication system that will allow the journal to welcome both guest-edited, theme-based issues – facilitating in-depth and broad-scope investigations on topics of timely concern and interest – and rolling, open call issues – bolstering the explorative, interdisciplinary endeavours and growingly diversified intellectual journeys of the games research communities.

The rich array of topics and diverse approaches that populate this issue represents an example of the intercultural, transdisciplinary research into games, play, and gaming that *GAME* has been welcoming and for which it will continue to represent a generous platform. In this issue, our authors grapple with a wide range of perspectives and conceptual frameworks that represent the interdisciplinary development of games studies as a field over the course of the past two decades. Overall, these contributions explore disciplines like media and games archaeologies, offer reflections on dimensions like agency and ownership, explore industrial and legislative frameworks, and interrogate the relations between art and avantgarde in and through gaming. While focusing on a variety of national and transnational contexts, this issue's contributions offer theoretical and conceptual frameworks that address foundational questions for games studies, such as the notion of play and its ideological production in the late twentieth century, the sociocultural construction of games as object of investigation, and the nature and dynamics of national and global industrial formations.

In “The Playful Turn and Critical Play”, Braxton Soderman and Justin Keever address broadly relevant questions, such as the value of critiquing play, as play itself may become a form of critique, while the workings of critique are made increasingly playful. Bringing to the surface the criticalities of movements “against play” that do not critique *through* play or do not aim to make play critical, the Authors address this dimension as a creative force as much as a potential accomplice of dominant ideologies. The following article turns to further reflections on games studies' developments as Stefano Caselli, Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone, and Tomasz Z. Majjowski explore the now well-established “historical turn” and sub-field in game studies by addressing the multifaceted relationship between the fields of digital games and historiographical research. The Authors focus on the growing role played by digital games in cultural memory-making processes: dwelling on theoretical reflections on the notions of prosthetic memory, historical fantasy, pseudohistory, and metaphor, they address the rich intersections and increasingly open gateways to both history-making and critical historiography afforded by games research.

The ensuing articles turn to issues pertaining to national and transnational contexts and dynamics. In “‘Your Subaltern is not my Subaltern’: Intersectionality and the Dangers of a Single Game-story”, Zahra Rizvi and Souvik Mukherjee address a timely and urgent issue: while the role of the postcolonial and the Subaltern in video games is increasingly discussed, games made in the Global South are rarely the object of such discussions, which instead perpetuate an agenda focused on products developed in the Global North. By identifying and underscoring the impact of absences and omissions in current scholarship, and by interrogating and unravelling game-stories that are given precedence *vis-à-vis* game-stories that are not being told, the Authors argue for a shift in focus onto game-stories, epistemologies, and discursive modes hailing from South Asia. In so doing, Rizvi and Mukherjee suggest the challenging, decentering, and

provincializing of the geopolitical hegemonies of Global North games studies not only from a performative, but from a procedural and grounded perspective. Turning back to the European context, in “The many facets of culture in digital games policy: the EU dimension”, Maria O’Brien discusses state support for digital games production within the European Union, where games are indeed considered as cultural objects, albeit “not quite as cultural” as other media like film. As a result, few decisions granting approval by the European Commission are taken to support games, in contrast to the extensive number of decisions for other audio-visual forms. O’Brien thus highlights how the notion of culture may operate as a shifting signifier pointing underpinning diverse frameworks of value. The following contribution turns to the issues stemming from a nation-based focus on games. In “Game Studies Meets Japanese Studies: Ten Years of Research”, Luca Paolo Bruno asks the reader to question what makes a digital game “Japanese”. The essay provides an example of contemporary approaches to attend discourses of gaming historiography, industrial practices, and regional studies, which are confronted through the nexus of ideas of “Japanese” games.

The contributions that follow focus on issues that pertain to both the memory of games and the epistemic orbits in which their frames of value can be attracted and stationed. In “Game(play) Archives: Quebec Video Games as Case Study”, Dany Guay-Bélanger, Maxime Deslongchamps-Gagnon, Francis Lavigne, and Bernard Perron discuss a preservation protocol that includes *corpora* of Québécoise games and packages of audiovisual recordings, game datasheets, and copies of meta and paratextual documents for preservation, pedagogy, and guideline creation. Turning to Italy, in “Games and Cathode Rays: Discourses on a New Medium in the Italian Specialized Magazines (1981-1988)”, Diego Cavallotti focuses on 1980s, game-oriented, tinkering-oriented, and video-oriented magazines emerging in that national context as a new medium is taking over living rooms and game arcades. Cavallotti reconstructs the epistemic framework in which video games emerged as a cultural phenomenon in Italy and reflects on how magazines moulded their projected readers in this context. Shifting the issue’s focus to discourses around what constitutes “art” in relation to gaming, Gemma Fantacci examines contaminations between video game culture and contemporary artistic practices in “Sovversioni Videoludiche: Dalle avanguardie alle pratiche performative in-game”. At the intersection of games studies and contemporary notions of artmaking, video games – as Fantacci argues – display a capacity to mobilise semiotic subversion and political analysis that reconnects the medium to the experiences and critical matrixes of twentieth-century avant-gardes.

Overall, these articles offer a snapshot of the increasingly established place of gaming and play research in international academia. While far from exhausting the breadth and diversity of both established and emerging approaches in games research, the contributions included in this issue may serve as an example of the gaming medium’s gradual transitioning from the periphery of academic inter-

est to a timely object whose far-reaching consequences are at the core of the interests of many disciplines.

REMEMBERING PROFESSOR PATRICK JOHN COPPOCK

On a closing note, *GAME* wishes to remember and celebrate the work of Professor Patrick John Coppock. Early in 2023, we were deeply saddened to hear of Coppock's passing on the 13th of February. A psychologist, linguist, and semiotician, Coppock was a scholar of international reach. His work took place as extensively in Norway as in Italy, where his accomplishments have been promptly celebrated by AISS – the Italian Association of Semiotic Studies. Coppock's work focused on writing and corporeality, particularly by drawing from and building on the perspective of Peirce's semiotics. He was also a pioneer in the game studies community, having participated in the founding of the Game Philosophy Network (2005, <https://www.gamephilosophy.org/>) and through a decisive role in establishing Game_Philosophy@UniMore (2007, <https://web.archive.org.../20071.../http://game.unimore.it/>). Coppock's fruitful collaborations with Italian academic institutions, especially in the cities of Bologna and Reggio Emilia, brought together disciplinary interests that included the Philosophy and Theory of Ludic and Social Media, which he explored in his taught courses and scientific output. Among Coppock's numerous publications, we wish to underscore *E/C*'s 2010 theme-based issue dedicated to video games as text and practices, co-curated with Dario Compagno (http://www.ec-aiss.it/monografici/5_computer_games.php), as well as a monographic issue of *Bianco e Nero* (564, 2010), co-edited with Marcella Rosi and Federico Giordano. Both issues helped some of *GAME*'s forthcoming Editors cut their teeth on academic research.

Coppock has, indeed, represented a point of reference as the nascent Editorial Board of *GAME Journal* sought to elect their Scientific Board. Coppock's work approached games as key sites of practices of enunciation, corporeality, and signification, in a way that contrasted with the belatedness of most of the academic *milieu* of the time. Coppock thus stood among some of the most ardent supporters of a scientific approach to electronic gaming. His steadfast support to the *GAME* project proved invaluable for a Journal that took its initial steps through the enthusiasm of then (sometimes pre-) doctoral students, at a time when the idea of studying video games at the University represented an exception—and, in the most conservative academic circles, could still sound like an irrelevant or even absurd endeavour. In hindsight, one would be hard-pressed to downplay the importance of Coppock's intuition—and mentorship of future game scholars. A decade later, scepticism about video games as a legitimate venue for research has given way to the widespread recognition of the medium's central role in contemporary media ecologies and the semiotic practices of millions of people. The editors at *GAME* and the game studies community will therefore remember Professor Patrick John Coppock for his

vast and multidisciplinary knowledge, his brilliant wit, and his inexhaustible intellectual curiosity — as well as his ability to recognize, encourage, and support emerging projects that dared explore a putative oddity or fad as sanctioned by conservative quarters. We hope that Coppock's name and his transnational scholarly figure will be able to inspire a growing reappraisal and celebration of the historical and cultural diversity of games research.

The Editors at GAME Journal