

From the Editor's Desk



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Editor in Chief

Computer games and the gaming industry are a major cultural and economic force throughout the world. The US computer game and videogame industry—now a more than \$18 billion juggernaut that exceeds the recorded music trade and movie industry in revenue—continues to draw new customers and expand its demographic base (which has always been a bit broader than the stereotypical teenage boy/nerd and now includes an ever-increasing number of adults and women). Content used to only move from the big screen to game screens (i.e., *007* and *Karate Kid*), but videogame characters such as *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft are now the source of major movie franchises. For many young people, computer games were their earliest introduction to computing. And back in the early personal computer era, games were among the driving forces for many hobbyists to buy these systems.

It has been nearly four decades since the Magnavox Odyssey launched the videogame home-console market, and more than three decades since Atari gave it new life and accelerated growth with the VCS 2600—a market that is now dominated by Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony. It has been even longer since *Tennis for Two* (1952) was developed on an analog computer for oscilloscope display at Brookhaven National Laboratory and *Spacewar!* debuted on a PDP-1 at MIT (1962). Such developments have not escaped historians and other writers. Nevertheless, little critical historical analysis has been written on computer games to date. Much of the existing literature is blindly celebratory, or merely descriptive rather than scholarly and analytical. Only a small number of scholars have undertaken rigorous analysis of computer games. This follows a more general historiographical trend to focus far more on sites and implements of work than leisure.

Yet, as a technology primarily (though far from exclusively) of leisure, computer games are a rich topic to explore culture, identity, social interactions, design, computer science, and business—as the articles of this special issue skillfully demonstrate. This issue is not only among the first collections of quality scholarship on the history of computer games, it is international in scope, offering analyses from both the sides of the Atlantic.

Guest Editor Henry Lowood is one of the foremost authorities on the history of computer games and videogames and has run an important research project at Stanford University on the topic for years, “How They Got Game.” (The project website has an abundance of intriguing multimedia content; see <http://www.stanford.edu/group/htgg/cgi-bin/drupal/>). After his perceptive issue introduction, Lowood provides an insightful article, analyzing Pong within its complex human, organizational, and design contexts. He sheds light on both the intersection and disconnection between computer and television technologies in early digital game development.

Petri Saarikoski and Jaakko Suominen give an important overview of the history of computer games and gaming culture in Finland. They offer international comparisons, exploring both global trends and national specialties, and discuss the role of collective experiences and game journalism in shaping and reflecting game culture.

Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost focus on display technologies of videogames, detailing the opportunities and limitations of random- and raster-graphic displays in designing and creating game worlds. They convincingly show how the challenges of these different display technology standards often led to creative fermentation and innovation.

Anker Jorgensen examines the history of an early computer game, *Nimbi*, which was developed at the Danish Computer company Regnecentralen in the early 1960s and is a variant of the ancient mathematical game Nim. In unfolding this rich narrative, Jorgensen analyzes the individual and institutional actors and cultural and intellectual meanings of early efforts to merge games and computers.

Finally, Casey O'Donnell provides a different vantage point, examining standardization issues, digital rights management (DRM) mechanisms, and copy protection systems of console makers. He skillfully demonstrates how much of what DRM seeks to accomplish today with other digital content was forcefully implemented more than two decades ago with Nintendo's NES.

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