

Editorial Critical

Holger Pötzsch and Kristine Jørgensen

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HOLGER PÖTZSCH AND KRISTINE JØRGENSEN

*Do you have enough love in your heart
To get your hands dirty?*

'Dirty' by grandson (2020)

Critical appears to be a timely word. Timely because we live in critical times with major turning points ahead that require difficult decisions. Ranging from climate change and species extinction to soaring inequalities, wars, genocides, raging poverty, and fading democracies, it is critical that we act, that we do this decisively, immediately and collectively, and without pretending we can somehow reconcile endless growth with a greening of societies or magically shape a system that allows for both the accumulation of insane wealth at the top and for improved living standards for everyone else (Hickel, 2021). We cannot have our cakes and eat them. Someone will have to be held accountable for profiting from the mess created and who this will be is the source of much current and future conflict and strife.

Such times—and this is the second reason for the timeliness of the term serving as a header for this editorial—requires criticality in thinking and acting from everyone including game scholars, game designers, and players. As Hammar, Jong, and Despland-Lichtert (2023) have asserted in the previous issue of *Eludamos*, it is crucial that our field understands and critically reflects upon its own implication in the situation and dares to act accordingly. In the current situation, signing a petition online or including an eco-aware message into a power-hungry commercial game might no longer be enough and prove equally insufficient as travels across the globe to give 20-minutes presentations on the Anthropocene at some major conference (Thierry et al., 2023).

Instead, we need to question and change our own fundamental practices and launch actual challenges against a destructive status quo and its received power relations and ways of doing things. As we asserted in the editorial of the 2023 issue of *Eludamos* with reference to Brecht's (1939) renowned poem *To Posteriority*, we can still play and have conversations about games (Pötzsch and Jørgensen, 2023, p. 2). However, we do not any longer have the luxury of disregarding the significant part videogames play in the destruction of the planet's ecosphere and in exploitative practices for the sake of generating even higher profits for the already hyper-rich.

Digital technologies, including videogames are neither clean nor green but require rapidly increasing amounts of natural resources, energy, area, and water (Crawford, 2021, Abraham, 2020). The extraction, manufacturing, distribution, use, and disposal of digital games and the physical devices they are played on lay waste to ecosystems, exploit and endanger workers, and undermine societies while at the same time ensuring massive profits for the few (Hammer, Jong, and Despland-Lichter, 2023). In this context, neither designers, players, nor the discipline of game studies can withhold from the responsibility to do things differently both in terms of the products and practices we criticize or commend and our own conduct as scientists and citizens.

The demand, and indeed the urgent need, to think and act critically also extends into the practice of academic publishing. *Eludamos* is a diamond open access journal. This means that all articles published with us can be read, used, and further distributed free of charge by anyone provided the original author is duly acknowledged. At the same time, we do not claim article processing charges (APCs) by neither individual authors, nor academic institutions. We do this because we firmly believe that publicly funded research that is peer-reviewed and editorially processed for free should not be the source of private profits for anyone but should be freely accessible to all. This, however, carries the danger of (self-)exploitation. Therefore, the editorial board of *Eludamos* continuously looks for funding to at least be able to pay copyeditors their due share. Because DOA publishing matters as an academic but also as a political practice. As Pooley (2024: 1) writes, open access publishing is a utopian practice and an important component of a politics attempting to build a better future in academia and beyond: “Whether or not another (scholarly publishing) world is possible, it is important to act *as if it is*” (emphasis in original).

Thinking and acting critically means leaving comfort zones, looking out beyond one’s own immediate surrounds (both digital and otherwise), and acting upon what we see. This is often a profound challenge: it is demanding, sometimes scary, and often comes with backlashes created when one addresses established power-structures, hegemonies, and privileges in a critical manner. This is why we can only do these things together. As isolated individuals forced into relentless competition with everyone and everything, we stand no chance against the combined forces of economic and political special interests and their exploitative and reactionary agendas. As the US-Canadian artist grandson formulates it in the quote opening this editorial, *do we have enough love in our hearts to get our hands dirty* as scholars, practitioners, and citizens when faced with the apocalyptic triple-bind of ongoing ecocides, genocides, and sustained attempts to dismantle our freedoms and democracies?

Even against such a backdrop of urgency, however, life—scholarly as well as other—goes on and so do the activities of *Eludamos*, its authors, reviewers, and editors. The issue currently in your virtual hands contains nine peer-reviewed scholarly articles distributed across an open section and a special section on esports. In addition to

this peer-reviewed content, we offer four book reviews, a special section introduction, and one commentary. Together, these contributions critically explore a variety of aspects of games, play, game culture, and development from different theoretical and methodological vantage points.

Open section

In the article 'Distinguishing the Players of the Digital Field: A Multiple Correspondence Analysis of the Socialisation Practice Within Swedish Gaming', Tim Timvig employs Bourdieu's three types of capital to explore socialization processes in Swedish gaming culture. Reported results indicate a clear division along axes of age and gender, but showing only minor variations in terms of social class, ethnicity, or upbringing.

The contribution '(Re)producing Orientalism: Industry Logic of Chinese Mobile Game Re-Skins in the Global App Empire' by Yizhou Xu examines reskinning as an element in the production of mobile copycat games in China. Based on insights from ethnographic fieldwork in the industry, the author argues for both a theoretical and technical dimension of the practice of re-skinning that points beyond industrial mimicry in standardized game production and can also entail a "subversion against seemingly totalizing control of the US-dominated app economy".

In their article 'Parties as Playful Experiences: Why Game Studies Should Study Partying', Leland Masek and Jaakko Stenros argue that party studies should constitute a subfield of game studies. Based on analyses of 33 semi-structured interviews highlighting playful party experiences they show similarities between partying and game play and propose a new conceptualization of partying as a form of playfulness. Expanding the field of game studies into new areas, the contribution offers an empirically motivated rethinking of basic concepts that enables new research questions and insights important for the further development of the discipline.

Adopting a game analytical perspective, David Matencio's contribution 'Playing Rogues: Picaresque Experiences in Videogames' traces how mechanical and narrative design choices in games featuring rogue characters are predisposed by genre conventions of Picaresque literature. Drawing upon insights from analyses of three role-playing games featuring picaresque elements, the author investigates how games offer "picaresque experiences" and explains how these limit player choices and spread across medial frames.

Finally, Mark Maletka conducts a literature review to assess the state of the art in queer games studies. The article 'Queer Gender Identities and Videogames: Literature Review' shows that there is an overreliance of research on received categories

and argues that there is a palpable lack of attention to queer temporalities and spatialities in the field. He concludes that the identified gap should be addressed in future research.

Special section: Sustaining equitable competitive gaming

The present issue of *Eludamos* also contains a special section on competitive gaming (esports) guest edited by Nick Taylor. In his introduction titled 'Who Cares About Esports? Introduction to the Special Section on Sustaining Equitable Competitive Gaming', Taylor offers a brief overview and critique of the field of esports studies before introducing the four contributions composing the section:

1. 'Deconstructing Esports: Why We Need to Acknowledge Bodies in a Move Toward More Equitable Esports Practices' by Tom Legierse and Maria Ruotsalainen.
2. "I Want to Play a Normal Game. I Don't Need All This.": Exploring Gender Diversity in Portuguese Esports" written by Carina Assuncao, Michael Scott and Rory Summerley.
3. 'Changing the Game but Keeping to the Rules: Ambivalences between Social Activism and Content Creation in the Brazilian Esports Scene' by Beatriz Blanco.
4. 'Infrastructuralized Moderation on a Gaming Adjacent Platform: The Platformization of a Youth Center' by Fredrik Rusk, Matilda Ståhl and Isac Nyman.

Book reviews

Following the special section, we offer four book reviews of recent titles that, each in a specific manner, open new perspectives on the relationship between video-games, play, and the world.

Firstly, Lykke Guanio-Uluru presents a reading and critique of the 28-chapter anthology *EcoGames: Playful Perspectives on the Climate Crisis*, edited by Laura op de Beke, Joost Raessens, Stefan Werning and Gerald Farca. While being broad in scope and theoretically diverse, Guanio-Uluru finds that the book underemphasizes material aspects of the relation between games, play, and the climate crisis. Still, she welcomes it as a crucial contribution to the field offering a plethora of new insights.

In a second review, Emil Lundedal Hammar provides an overview of Marijam Did's *Everything to Play For: How Videogames are Changing the World*. He argues that Did's work attempts a profoundly critical perspectivization and makes "a convincing case

for why games should be taken seriously ... as they ... are symptomatic of the exploitation and immiseration within capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy”.

Hans-Joachim Backe reviews Alex Mitchell and Jasper van Vught’s volume *Videogame Formalism. On Form, Aesthetic Experience and Methodology*. According to the reviewer, the book constitutes a thorough “demonstration of videogame formalism that is rather peerless in its scope and ambition”, offering an applicable framework for game analysis.

Lastly, Philip Hammond presents his view on Curtis D. Carbonell’s monograph *World War Two Simulated: Digital Games and Reconfigurations of the Past*, a book that, he finds, asks important questions about the relation between games, war, and history yet often fails to offer convincing answers to the problems it raises.

Commentary

Finally, in this issue’s commentary titled ‘Transgender Emergence in Video Games: Intersections, Discourses, Directions’, Robin Longobardi Zingarelli explores transgender themes in video games, play, and game culture. The author argues for the capacity of videogames to offer meaningful experiences by presenting a widening array of transgender characters and employing new procedural elements such as character customization to allow for an alignment of play with non-normative identities and life worlds. At the same time, however Longobardi Zingarelli also alerts readers to the still persisting danger of using games to “perpetuate transphobia and exploit transgender experiences” for economic and other purposes.

Final remarks

To end this editorial, we once again take up some internal issues at *Eludamos*. We start with good news for our tenure-track authors: thanks to a continued cooperation with Septentrio Academic Publishing our journal is now indexed in Scopus, ERIH PLUS, and DOAJ while an application to Web of Science is under development. Otherwise, the editorial team has adopted an [AI policy for Eludamos](#) detailing how authors should relate to the opportunities and challenges posed by large language models and other generative technologies. Sad news is that our copyeditor Aurora Eide has left us to take up a teaching position at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Good luck, Aurora, and thanks for smooth, efficient cooperation and your many reliable contributions.

Lastly, as always, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editors who made this current issue of *Eludamos* possible. Without you, it would be impossible to keep the critical conversation on games, play, and game

production taking place on the pages of our journal going. Thank you so much for your relentless efforts and all the time and energy you dedicate to this endeavor!

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