

GAMES AND PLAY



Edited by Víctor Navarro-Remesal and Óliver Pérez-Latorre

# Perspectives on the European Videogame

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# Games and Play

*Games and Play in Contemporary Culture and Society* is a new international and interdisciplinary book series dedicated to game and play research.

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*Edited by*  
*Víctor Navarro-Remesal &*  
*Óliver Pérez-Latorre*

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# Prologue

## Conflict, Negotiation, Appropriation, and Diversity: The Challenge of European Game Studies

*Torill Elvira Mortensen*

### Abstract

What is play, what does it mean to be European, and how are games and play studied in Europe? This prologue questions and explores both the shared traits and differences of what could be seen as 'European game studies'. This space, predominantly anchored in the humanities, is not unified but rather comprises wide range of individual researchers and smaller centres, research groups, and initiatives that collaborate for a for a time, then reform to focus on other topics. What this boils down to is an understanding of Europe as something that is both fragmented and diverse, but at the same time connected. European game studies is a constantly evolving story of collaborations across various cultural gaps.

**Keywords:** Play, Games, Europe, Humanities, Game Studies

Playing games does something to us. When I pick up a skipping rope or a rubber ball, my entire body remembers how I used them in the past, and, though I may hurt tomorrow, I am still able to skip to the rhymes learned half a century ago. The ritual, the rhythm, and awareness of play remains embedded not just in our brains but also in our bodies. Tied closely to our past, games are also passed on from one group of children to the next: they entail history, tradition, and challenge all in one. Games give us something to strive for, a connection to others, and the ability to handle loss and victory. They teach us to understand the distinctions between different contexts as we handle the balance between make-believe and real, and they are consistent examples of the value of rules, structure, and limitations, and how these ludic elements also offer opportunities: how restrictions can be

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turned into advantages, how systems can be overcome or worked around. Games teach us how to cheat, how to notice and reveal cheating, as well as how to recognise broken systems and how they influence our interactions. They are lessons in fairness and in systemic bias, in the importance of practice and the value of strategy and tactics.

When we speak of game studies, we tend to start with Dutch historian of culture Johan Huizinga, who published *Homo Ludens* in 1938 (Huizinga, 2000). There are others who like to start with the philosopher Immanuel Kant and his *Critique of Judgement* from 1790 (Kant, 2007), which considers play as vital for the ability to enjoy and to pass judgement without being consistently disappointed. But these academic references do not give justice to the ancient presence of play in human culture, and possibly in proto-human times. Play, and play-signal games, are observed in animals and are very important in interaction within and across species. Our pets play with us and we play back, a situation we take for granted, but which is nevertheless a miracle of cross-species communication.

Even mammals living in the ocean manage to communicate with us through play. In 2019, a harness-wearing beluga whale was spotted off the Norwegian coast and allowed helpers to approach and remove the (originally Russian) harness. As it did not leave for open water, but lingered close to people, it was named Hvaldimir, a Norwegian pun on the word 'hval' ('whale') and the Russian name Vladimir. In the months that followed, Hvaldimir remained near human habitats, clearly playing with people who approached it. It stole a flipper from a diver, and then carefully returned it, as well as a camera from a man in a kayak, which was also carefully returned. While this example is clearly of a lovingly trained whale who has learned at least parts of this behaviour through deliberate socialising, it uses play as a way to reach out across species. There is a video on the Internet of Hvaldimir teasingly playing with a seagull: offering a fish, taking it away, pulling gently at the gull from below, then leaving the fish for the gull again (Johansen, 2019). It is pretty clear the seagull does not see this as threatening behaviour, as it does not try to fly away, and the humans watching also interpret the whale's behaviour as play. These play signals crossed the lines of the three species and were recognisable despite the "home elements" of the three species involved: water, air, and earth.

European game studies look at this ubiquitous presence of play and the way it is refined into ritualised and rule-determined behaviour in a wide variety of arenas. It is predominantly anchored in the humanities, as a study of game structures, their communicative power, play practices, and game cultures. The two best known European centres of game education



and research are Center for Computer Game Research (CCGR) at the IT University of Copenhagen, and the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies in Finland, led from Tampere University; both are firmly anchored in a humanist tradition studying game structure, content, and practice. Other institutions in Europe take, at least partially, a similar approach—the Centre for Games and Play at Utrecht University studies the ‘ludification of culture’, the Liège Game Lab at Liège University works on videogames as a cultural object, and the multidisciplinary team at the Institute of Digital Games at the University of Malta includes scholars of literature, philosophy, and media studies, to name just a few examples.

Simultaneously, there are several strong projects running in Europe that draw on the social sciences, such as the excellent and unique longitudinal study of social life with digital games, *The Social Fabric of Virtual Life*, by the University of Muenster. Around these specialised centres and research projects we see a myriad of other ways to study games. In conjunction with the study of digital game structure and culture, there has been a very interesting direction of studying the culture and practice of live action role-play (LARP). Drawing on performance, play, and games theory, the study of LARP captures how seamlessly digital and analogue game studies can merge through the understanding of play and play cultures.

There are several counter-arguments to this ideal of a peaceful trans-topic and trans-disciplinary coexistence and, as soon as this book is printed, they will no doubt be expressed. The image of a unified European game studies is an over-simplification. What we actually have in Europe is a wide range of individual researchers and smaller centres, research groups, and initiatives that collaborate for a period of time, then reform to focus on other topics. Their collaboration is to a very large extent driven by expediency and funding (or lack of it) and is marked by the significant differences between the educational and research institutions across Europe. European game studies includes the study of bootleg games hacked to fit obscure consoles behind the Iron Curtain and the relocation of game companies to Ireland in order to advantage of a cheap, available, and well-educated workforce in an English-speaking country. It includes the study of queer player practices and overlaps into studies of sex and pornography, and also includes transgressive play and excessive play. So what can we claim to be genuinely European about game studies?

Perhaps the first rule of European game studies is to note that we are all on the periphery. Even the well-known centres are small and peripheral, they are not connected to large game production centres or even, in a global sense, particularly large universities. Denmark and Finland are

small countries with small languages that offer a smaller group of potential students. Despite the prevalence of English as an academic language, living and studying in most European countries means having to be able to glean at least some meaning from the local language. And this is a very European thing: almost everybody is expected to speak two or three languages in order to get around and be understood. The sense of being a foreigner is something we are introduced to early, as our own language and culture is in most cases understood as a starting point, a base from which to learn other languages and cultures.

We can say that to be European is to possess an identity that is in constant negotiation. Depending on what you think of as Europe, it may be defined as a passport zone, a common currency, or an economic or political collaboration; it is a geographical unit with a history of conflict and collaboration across boundaries that somehow overlap all the current understandings of Europe, but that also occasionally break them. No matter how simply we may try to put it, Europe is not easy to define, and to say something is European without further qualification can appear to have very little meaning. The history of the moors of the Iberian Peninsula is as European as the traditions of the Sami reindeer herders of the northern tundra, and with such a wide variety under the umbrella of *European*, the term appears to be useless. But we still use it, and we still find meaning in it because this wide variety, this diversity of history and culture, is in itself uniquely European. Europeans are different from one another in ways that are fundamentally different from those differentiating them from the rest of the world.

When you live in Europe, you rarely think of yourself as European. We grow up as Spanish, Italian, French, Norwegian, or Danish. Our languages are distinctly different; some grow from the same roots, such as the Indo-European languages of French and German, while the roots of others, such as Finnish and Basque, remain a mystery. While most of Europe is Christian, there are strong influences from other religions in our cultures, pagan rituals are still celebrated—either openly or under the guise of Christianity—and the influence of Muslim culture remains strong along the European Mediterranean coastline, in the Balkans and the eastern boundaries of Europe. There is also little unity in looks, European peoples are shaded in gradients according to millennia of exposure to the sun before being mixed with the mobility that this continent has always afforded. All of this is packed together in a relatively small space. Despite its size—Europe is larger than the United States of America and Australia in square kilometres—the main part of its population can be found in a relatively small space in the western, central, and near-eastern parts of Europe.



If you decide to travel through this space, you experience this diversity of Europe first-hand. My most defining experience of Europe was as a young interrailer, when we would get on a train in a land where they spoke Danish and get out in a land where they spoke German just a short trip later. We could travel through the night to save money, hopping on a train in northern France after dinner, and stumble out into the morning light surrounded by Italian voices to look for breakfast. Once we were broke in Switzerland, but at least we understood the language, and another time we got lost without our local friends in pre-perestroika Hungary. The moment we were outside of the boundaries of our own small country we were somewhere new and different: different sounds, tastes, scents, images, architecture, art, it was a kaleidoscope of new experiences. But as long as we stayed in Europe, everybody we met recognised us as European. They knew where our little country was in relation to theirs, and although Europeans are not always polite, we never felt as if we were unknown to each other.

What this boils down to is an understanding of Europe as something fragmented and diverse, but at the same time connected. With the European Union this idea of connection has become stronger, and the use of a common currency and a common passport union has tied the many parts of Europe tighter together, bringing historical rivals and enemies into close collaboration. Even so Europe is straining at the bounds, with individual nations turning away from what is perceived nationally as too strong a unity and striving for national exceptionalism. Even this is European. This continent does not have a long history of peace, and even if there are currently no wars there is unrest, terror, and protests. Within my lifetime, Spain has gone from a Francoist dictatorship to a democratic monarchy, the Berlin Wall was built the year I was born, but fell in 1989, followed soon after by the Communist regime of the USSR; this led to significant change cross Central and Eastern Europe, exemplified by the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia into Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also to years of war as what was known as Yugoslavia was dissolved and rebuilt as seven new recognised sovereign states. The UK pushed for the formation of the European Union but has pulled out recently. And these are just a few of the changes in borders, regimes, and alliances within Europe. The history of Europe is one of continuous change. The borders of the USA, the so-called New World, are currently much more stable than the borders of Europe.

But what this creates is a mixture of cultures that creates space for dialogue. At a European game conference, such as DiGRA 2018, you will—even before greeting colleagues from further abroad—find native European



speakers of at least sixteen different languages. Several of these languages are spoken in countries with distinctly different allegiances and cultures, such as English, which is spoken in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, countries with as long and intense a history of conflict as most other European countries do. It was not long ago that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) toned down their actions against the UK government, and in the recent bid by the UK to leave the European Union, Scotland was in favour of staying, leading to rejuvenated discussions of Scottish independence. Other languages are distinct mostly as a formality, such as Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish, as the different languages are similar enough that it is relatively easy to understand one another, but none of these countries would dream of unifying the languages in order to create a common 'High Scandinavian', like the Hochdeutsch of the German Republic. Instead, what this diversity creates is a consistent understanding of the need to negotiate. Nobody can be perfectly versed in the culture of others, and so national and linguistic diversity is expected and made room for.

And this is perhaps the main strength of European game studies. The visible peaks of singular scholars do not create the real story. Instead, European game studies is a constantly evolving story of collaborations across cultural gaps. DiGRA, the Digital Games Research Association, is exactly such an example. It has Finnish bylaws and is registered in Finland, following Finnish rules of non-profit organisations, but it has a membership that spans the globe, and the working group to establish DiGRA in 2002 comprised 25 members from thirteen nations, out of which four nations, represented by ten people, were not European.

But this culture for spaces of dialogue, this consistent understanding of the value and importance of negotiation, leads to us taking Europe for granted. Its culture and history can be inhabited and used by all members of the world with impunity and historical precedence. In game studies we see this in how the history and myth of Europe becomes a playground for game designers all over the world. While this is an example of European cultural imperialism, where European culture has replaced local myths, it is also an example of how well the diverse, geographically limited, conflict-ridden space of Europe fits a game board. This offers European game studies a unique opportunity to study Europe in a new and exciting manner: as a playground for the imagination of the world. How are European practices of interaction, collaboration, cultural mingling, migrating traditions, and ideals of leadership and politics interpreted and reinterpreted in game structures, designs, and content? What is the ludic Europe? What are our ludo-histories?



This anthology starts poking at this question. I do not expect there to be a simple, easy, or final answer. It will develop and change as Europe consistently does. Because that is Europe: a mix of ancient tradition and constant development, local consistency and global movement, strong identities and repeated negotiations, high ideals, and harsh conflicts. Understanding it is a brilliantly complex challenge, made for us to play.

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# Introduction

## Euro Ludens: On the Origins, Playing Region, and Imaginaries of the European Videogame

Óliver Pérez-Latorre & Víctor Navarro-Remesal

### Abstract

The videogame industry has historically been perceived as a field dominated by Japan and the USA. Europe remains scarcely visible in gaming discussions, and European videogames are rarely discussed as *being European* in the same way that geopolitical origin would be factored in when discussing American or Japanese games. In this chapter, our intention is threefold: first, to propose a broad definition of the European videogame and single out some of its roots; second, to identify shared trends and traits in the games produced within this cultural space; and third, to introduce the multiple perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies employed by the authors of the following chapters, which compose a complex and polyhedral first approach to mapping the matter.

**Keywords:** European videogame, Eurogames, National Game Studies, Authorship, Social Discourse, Humour

The videogame industry has historically been perceived as a field dominated by Japan and the United States, with Europe being seen as a ‘third space’ overshadowed by these two countries. However, Europe has plenty of gamemakers, professional or otherwise, and a long history of game development. Various European development studios have built up remarkable creative prestige over the years and have had an impact on worldwide trends in the medium. Certainly, Europe has had less significance in terms of videogame publishers, but the French company Ubisoft has been a leading international publisher since the 90s, and the continent is also home to some of the largest trade shows across the world, like Gamescom, Paris Games Week,

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Milan Games Week, Madrid Games Week, and Nordic Game. Concerning the global videogame market, historical figures verify that Europe has played a significant role as ‘player/consumer’: in 2020, Germany, the UK, France, Spain, and Italy (the five biggest national markets in the continent) amounted to 21.15% of the global revenue (Statista, 2019).

Nevertheless, Europe, as a cultural space, remains virtually invisible in gaming discussions; or, at least, European videogames are rarely discussed as *being European* in the same way the geopolitical origin would be factored in when discussing American or Japanese games, or the way ‘Eurogames’ is used in board games communities to distinguish them from American productions. While *Americanness* is often considered as the default aesthetic (even in non-American productions) and *Japaneseness* is taken as a distinctive selling point outside Japan, *Europeanness* is rarely conceptualised in academia, criticism, and fandom. This is all the more surprising when considering the long tradition of scholarly analysis of games and videogames in European countries, starting from the foundational works of Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Jacques Henriot, or Mary Midgley. The ‘Homo Ludens’ is a European contribution to universal cultural analysis. While it was possible from quite early on to find various monographs on the history of North American videogames (Cohen, 1984; Kushner, 2004) and others on Japanese videogames (Sheff, 1993; Kohler, 2004; Gorges and Yamazaki, 2010), there are almost no specific publications on the history of European videogames from a trans- or multi-national perspective. Some attempts at changing this include a short chapter by Larrue et al. on the European videogame industry in *Secrets of the Game Business* (Laramee, 2005) and several Europe-oriented chapters in works by Wolf (2008, 2015) and Donovan (2010). More recently, in 2017, the journal *Well Played* dedicated a special issue (Fernández-Vara and Foddy, 2017) to European Videogames of the 1980s, edited by Clara Fernández-Vara and Bennett Foddy and with contributions by authors from Spain, Finland, and Italy, which paved the way for the project we take on with this book.

In this first chapter, our intention is threefold: first, to propose a broad definition of the European videogame and single out some of its roots; second, to identify shared trends and traits in the games produced within this cultural space; and third, to introduce the multiple perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies employed by the authors of the following chapters, which compose a complex and polyhedral first approach to mapping the matter. Given the dominance of videogames as one of the main entertainment products of our times, it is vitally important that Europe becomes aware of the role it plays in the medium and the role the medium



plays in the configuration of a shared cultural space. We would never pretend that such a complex object of study could be covered completely in a single book; instead, we hope this volume stimulates a much-needed conversation.

## Region-locked? Defining the European videogame and its roots

An inquiry such as this should start by exploring the very idea of Europe. Are we talking about a historical reality? About the European Union? The Schengen space? So-called ‘continental Europe’, excluding islands like Cyprus, Malta, Ireland, or the UK? Europe, both conceptually and geographically, has very diffuse boundaries.

This is made even more confusing with its conflation with the concept of Western civilisation. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, in an article titled ‘There is no such thing as western civilisation’ (2016), argues: ‘One reason for the confusions ‘western culture’ spawns comes from confusions about the west. We have used the expression ‘the west’ to do very different jobs’. The idea of ‘the west’, and Europe with it, has been brought to light by contrast: as the opposite of the East, of ‘one side of the iron curtain’, of the Muslim world, and more recently, as ‘the north Atlantic’. But rarely have Europe, or the West, been given a self-contained definition. Appiah goes all the way back to Greek historian Herodotus, explaining that he ‘only uses the word ‘European’ as an adjective, never as a noun. For a millennium after his day, no one else spoke of Europeans as a people, either’. Appiah warns against identifying Europe, or the West, with an exclusive set of values: ‘Values aren’t a birthright: you need to keep caring about them. Living in the west, however you define it, being western, provides no guarantee that you will care about western civilisation. The values European humanists like to espouse belong just as easily to an African or an Asian who takes them up with enthusiasm as to a European’.

Europe, it seems, must be searched for in plurality, in a constantly evolving collection of debates, exchanges of ideas, and mutual self-reflection. In 1966, George Steiner summarised it in *The Idea of Europe* as follows:

Five axioms to define Europe: the coffee house; the landscape on a traversable and human scale; these streets and squares named after the statesmen, scientists, artists, writers of the past; our twofold descent from Athens and Jerusalem; and, lastly, that apprehension of a closing chapter, of that famous Hegelian sunset, which shadowed the idea and substance of Europe even in their noon hours (Steiner, 2015).



'The café', he elaborates, 'is a place for assignation and conspiracy, for intellectual debate and gossip, for the *flâneur* and the poet or metaphysician at his notebook'. This is a quite romantic idea, but one we nevertheless find useful for the way it focuses on *meetings*, on debates. Europe debates itself; it *is* a debate, and one that, given its 'human scale' landscape, cannot be ignored. Moreover, it is as much a debate among Europeans as a debate on how to be a part of the world.

For all this, we will use 'Europe' in this book to refer to the continent (including its various islands), and the countries, cultures, and meetings and clashes of ideas within that continent. In doing so, we do not aim to foster any kind of 'European pride' but rather to contribute to the self-reflection of a vital worldwide player.

As for the space of the European videogame, we have other, less abstract tools to describe it and argue for its conceptualisation. First, regional lockouts or encoding have been a common practise since the days of Nintendo's Famicom (and has only recently started to be abandoned) when the videogame industry became aware of its potential to become global. After Nintendo redesigned its Famicom to adapt it to the market demands of America, the idea of different regional versions of the same hardware, often with incompatible technical configurations, was widely accepted (i.e. Sega Genesis/Mega Drive, PC Engine/TurboGrafx16). These divisions frequently followed the use of different video formats across the world, with NTSC becoming the standard in Japan and North America; PAL in Europe (SECAM in France), Oceania, and some parts of South America and Africa; and SECAM in France, parts of Africa, and the Eastern Bloc. Nintendo, for example, had NTSC-U for North America, NTSC-J for Japan, PAL-A for the UK, Italy, and Australia and Zealand, and PAL-B for the rest of Europe. Third, the use of regional corporate divisions (such as Nintendo of Europe, established in 1990) was key for distribution and copyright matters. The overlap between regional corporate divisions, hardware encoding, and output video systems gives us a clearer idea of Europe as a videogame 'region' and, accordingly, of the native space of the European videogame.

Players have hacked and cracked platforms for decades in order to overcome regional barriers and import and play games from all over the world. The awareness of regional divisions, however, gained a new dimension with the advent of emulation and international online communities. A quick look at gaming channels on YouTube shows us that it is frequently the Americans who 'discover' Europe as a historically different region. A video on SNESDrunk, a channel dedicated to reviews of retro games, illustrates this: 'Wait, this existed? This was a thing? Yeah, that's right, Sonic had an arcade



game, and not just this one either: this was the first of three Sonic arcade games that were never officially released in North America. They either stayed in Japan or went to European countries like Spain' (2020). Episode 110 of GameSack, a YouTube channel dedicated to retro games, is called 'Left in Europe', and opens by saying: 'We're sick and tired of doing 'Left in Japan', [...] and I don't know, people we're talking about, you know, 'What about Europe? What about Europe?' Well now it's your turn, Europe, we're gonna talk about games that you got that we didn't get' (2014). The 'Region Locked' series on the DidYouKnowGaming? channel has several videos dedicated to Europe, such as 'Europe's Exclusive PlayStation 2 (PS2) Games'. This episode opens with the following narration: 'the European market is largely made up of games from developers who come from the region, developing titles that never leave their origin country. The reason for their lack of localisation could be from a difference in language or a lack of appreciation for the source material outside of where it comes from' (2017). In these cases, European-made games (and/or Europe-only exclusives) are highlighted for being rare and unavailable in one of the main markets, North America.

## European institutions and cultural policies as shaping factors of the region

Another perspective on the European videogame as a region comes from understanding it as an institutional ecosystem, one that is formed around companies from the 'primary' creative-productive sector (game developers, publishers, platform manufacturers, and so on) (cfr. De Prato, Lindmark & Simon, 2012). In this sense, the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) acts as an association of European companies, mainly publishers, representing them within the EU and other international spaces, while simultaneously acting as a unifying body for various national associations of the industry, such as SELL (France), AEVI (Spain), or SPIDOR (Poland). One of the most known initiatives of the ISFE is the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) Code, a self-regulation code that provides a content-rating system for consumers. The PEGI Code is not a censoring body but a code of conduct and a set of rules that publishers using it contractually follow. The code, which came into use in 2003, is used in 39 countries, and with it the rating of 'sensitive' content and the separation of different age groups is standardised throughout a vast geopolitical space. In this regard, the PEGI Code, as its American equivalent, the ESRB, creates a cohesively structured region.

State governments and public bodies have become progressively more involved in initiatives and aid programmes to support the sector's development, sometimes encouraged by the aforementioned national associations of game companies. For example, in the Nordic countries we find initiatives such as The Game Incubator, a non-profit organisation promoting the creation of game start-ups and giving support to young entrepreneurs, hosted by the Swedish Gothia Science Park (Skövde) and Lindholmen Science Park (Göteborg), as well as the public aid programmes of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture (Film Institute/Nordic Game), providing sums of up to 80,000 euros per videogame (Pérez Rufi, 2015, pp. 57–58). Nevertheless, public aid programmes have sparked certain controversies over ideological nuances: in 2008, France proposed a tax credit system of 20% on the development costs of videogames with 'cultural content' on the basis of supporting the games industry as part of the cultural industry (as Gaber, 2010, p. 173) has pointed out, 'the question whether digital games belong to the sphere of culture has important implications for European and international economic law, because of the legal safeguards justifying exemptions from the principle of trade liberalisation for cultural purpose'. The backdrop to this concerned the fact that the principal French publisher, Ubisoft, was then shifting production to Canada (Stewart & Misuraca, 2013, p. 71). The French proposal was considered a protectionist measure by parts of the games industry: namely, those global publishers who chose to define themselves as part of the software industry, rather than cultural industry. Nevertheless it got support by the European Games Developers Federation (EGDF) and the European Commission ruled in favour of the French measure in 2007, which was introduced in 2008 (Stewart & Misuraca, 2013, p. 72; for a more detailed explanation of this episode and its implications on EU's cultural policies, see Graber, 2010). After successfully campaigning in the UK, TIGA, the UK games industry trade body, obtained a similar UK concession in 2011, which took the form of Small Firms R&D Tax Credit, worth an estimated seven million euros per year to the industry (Stewart & Misuraca, 2013, p. 72). This difficulty in placing videogames as an industry is common in Europe: in Spain, for instance, the different measures to support it have come from either the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Industry, with constant debate as to where videogames actually belong. Bonet (2020, p. 88) highlights the similarities between videogames and other cultural industries, and points that some European scholarship on cultural industries included videogames in their research as early as the late-1980s, such as the Grenoble group (Miège, Pajon, & Saläun, 1986), or Ramón Zallo, from the University of the Basque Country (Zallo, 1988, p. 178). However, their inclusion in a

structure of public funding still results in these conceptual debates. There seems to be a consensus on the need to support national videogames, but the specifics of this support are still being discussed.

Along with the progressive involvement of national governments in supporting and revitalising the sector, the MEDIA programme of the European Commission has reserved a budget for promoting videogame projects since 2007 (Graber, 2010, p.184). Integrated in the Creative Europe programme since 2014, in recent years the MEDIA programme has highlighted the development of interactive digital content with a substantial narrative component, originality, creativity, and innovation, granting aids of 150,000–10,000 euros for the development of prototypes (Pérez Rufi, 2015, p. 63).

It is still early to say if these European-level efforts will result in a more cohesive space for European videogames, where creativity, production, circulation, and themes and style are shared and combined, or if the European videogame industry will keep being part of the conglomerate idea of 'Western games', with a stylistic hotchpotch identifiable only by not being American or Japanese (or Chinese, the rising contender in the international space of videogames).

### Pioneers of the European videogame: a brief historical overview

Aware of their boundaries or not, European videogames have been shaped by the games (analogue or digital) available in their territories, but have also been shaped by their local culture and media. It is also reasonable to assume that smaller national productions that could never reach America or Japan could reach other countries in their vicinity. This created a supranational circulation network in the continent that added an extra semiotic and stylistic layer to European productions. In this, certain pioneers, technologies, and scenes defined the conditions of possibility for the European videogame.

The origins of the European videogame are marked by what we call 'the *OXO* precedent'. In 1952, Alexander Shafter (Sandy) Douglas, a student at Cambridge University (England) created a simple version of noughts and crosses called *OXO* as part of his thesis on human–computer interaction. For Douglas, the thesis was the start of a fruitful career as a researcher and university professor, but *OXO* was gradually forgotten. Ten years later, a group of MIT students, Steve Russell, Martin Graetz, and Wayne Witaenem, thought that programming a simple game would be the best way of testing the limits of the faculty computer DEC PDP-1; the result was *Spacewar!* (1962). Unlike *OXO*, *Spacewar!* would make its way onto the market, through the



first coin-op videogame: *Computer Space* (Nutting Associates, 1971). Over time, the 'OXO case' would become a significant precedent in European videogame history: capacity for innovation and creative talent, prestigious European development studios, but a minor role in the videogame 'business', away from the powerful companies of the United States and Japan (Pérez-Latorre, 2013).

Something similar happened with *MUD: Multi-User Dungeon* (1980), an experiment by two Essex University students, Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw, to combine *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Crowther & Woods, 1976–1977) with traditional role-playing games in a multi-user environment. *MUD* became the first online multi-user videogame in history. Trubshaw and Bartle were 24 years ahead of the great success of *World of Warcraft*, but from a commercial angle it would seem that it was too early (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 71). Long before the popularisation of the Internet and broadband, the concept of an online multiplayer role-playing videogame was fascinating but more as a 'promise' than as a feasible reality for the market. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that in 1983 the French government rolled out the computer network Minitel, a predecessor to the modern Internet, which became a cultural phenomenon in the country (Mailland & Driscoll, 2017).

According to Fernández-Vara and Foddy, '[o]ne of the major technical divergences between European games and the games of the United States and Japan came from the difference in the available platforms' (2017, p. 2). Shortly before the (American) crash of 1983, the ZX Spectrum, an 8-bit personal computer with a cassette interface, was released in the UK and became a very popular game platform in Europe, followed soon by Amstrad CPC. Small development studios formed by young programmers who were passionate about videogames, called popularly 'bedroom coders' (Wade, 2016), started to spring up around these microcomputers. Some of them later became 'myths' of the industry, such as Ultimate Play The Game (later Rare) and Codemasters. In Spain, for example, this period is romanticised as 'the Golden Age of Spanish videogames', with games such as *La abadía del crimen* (OperaSoft, 1987), an unofficial adaptation of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, achieving cult status. The game is still remembered today: to commemorate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Spanish post office released a stamp set based on the game.

Between the mid-late 1980s and the early 1990s, European developers started to achieve international successes with a certain regularity: strategy videogames, such as *Populous* (Bullfrog, 1989) and *North and South* (Infogrames, 1989); car racing games by the English company Magnetic Fields, such as *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* (1990) and *Super Cars* (1990);





the 'drifting' space travel game *Elite* by David Braben and Ian Bell (1984), an open-ended game without a narrative storyline or predefined objectives (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, pp. 59–78); and, of course, the unforgettable Russian videogame *Tetris* (Pajitnov, 1984). Popular football series such as *Kick Off* (Dino Dini/Anco Software, 1989–) and *Sensible Soccer* (Sensible Software, 1992–) were also released at this time. Europe, and in particular France, was also one of the pioneers of playable horror, with Ubisoft's first game, an unofficial adaptation of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) called *Zombie* (1986) and, later, *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames, 1993), the first 3D survival horror game.

The 1990s saw the arrival and consolidation of other iconic franchises and innovative works that achieved global success, such as *Tomb Raider* (Core Design, 1996), *Grand Theft Auto* (DMA Design, 1997), 'comic strategy' games such as *Lemmings* (DMA Design, 1991) and *Worms* (Team17, 1995), *Flashback* (Delphine Software, 1992), and *Rayman* (Ubisoft, 1995). By the end of the decade, the videogame industry had become fully global and the Internet was starting to enter civil society, and by that time Europe had its own traditions, trends, and styles, developed in parallel with more global games and often limited to their countries of origin. The cases mentioned above, together with productions from Portugal, Italy, Finland, and many others that could not be included in this brief summary, paved the way for Quantic Dream, Dontnod, Playdead, Remedy, King, Supercell, Rovio, Amanita, CD Projekt, and many others from today.

## Common trends and traits of European videogames: on the European videogame imaginary

We have argued the case for Europe as a videogame 'region' and for the European videogame as a category. But is there a European videogame imaginary? If so, how can we begin to define it and identify some of its characteristic traits and traditions? Before we look at the in-depth analyses in each chapter of this book, we can sketch an overview as an introduction to this question.

### I. Realism and social commentary

In contrast with the great evasive fantasy epics of big-budget videogames from Japan and the United States, realism, social commentary, and the videogame as an instrument for critical reflection began to become relevant





quite early in the history of the European videogame. The origins of this current can be traced to a key aspect of the so-called ‘French touch’ of the videogames of the 1980s, led by authors such as Louis Le Breton and Bertran Brocard (on the history of French videogames, see Blanchet and Montagnon (2020), and Alexis Blanchet’s chapter in this book). These and other French creators set out to create videogames that were ‘more closely linked to reality’, sometimes addressing politically charged issues, such as authoritarian governments (*Même les pommes de terre ont des yeux*, Froggy Software, 1985) or slavery and the organisation of revolts in eighteenth-century Martinique (*Freedom: rebels in the darkness*, Coktel Vision, 1988) (Donovan, 2010, pp. 126–130). Later, the political videogame found an ‘Italian connection’ that would become emblematic of European production: La Molleindustria, promoted by Paolo Pedercini, has created some of the sharpest and most irreverent mini-games for reflecting critically on the dark side of capitalism (*McDonald’s videogame*, *Phone Story*), labour alienation (*Every day the same dream*), religion (*Run, Jesus Run!*), and the trivialisation of war in the age of drones (*Unmanned*). Recently, the success of *Life Is Strange*, by the French company Dontnod Entertainment (2015–), marks other possible lines of development of this European videogame ‘tradition’: the videogame oriented towards drama and human relations, in this case linked to a story of maturing or a *Bildungsroman*, with a parallel social commentary: Dontnod’s games address issues like bullying, racial conflict, and concern for the environment.

A different approach to social commentary in the videogame can be found in dystopian parables. Contemporary concerns commonly associated with European thinkers, including the entertainment society (Adorno and the Frankfurt School), emotional manipulation (Aldous Huxley), and the surveillance society (Foucault), resonate in recent dystopias of European videogames: the world governed by emotional engineering in *Red Strings Club* (Deconstructeam, 2018) and *Paranoia: Happiness is Mandatory* (Black Shamrock, 2019), video-surveillance in *Do Not Feed The Monkeys* (Fictiorama Studios, 2018), or the ultra-gamified futures that Lawrence Lek recreates in his playable art installations: ‘PlayStation’ and ‘2065’.

From another angle, some works bring social/historical discourse to the fore, approaching what we could consider to be an interactive docudrama. *Attentat 1942*, from Charles University in Prague (2017), combines archive footage, victim testimonies, and interactive scenes to recount the days of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. With a related focus, *Through the Darkest of Times*, created in Germany (Paintbucket Games, 2019), recreates the days before the rise of Nazism, giving the player an (anti-)empathic experience.



## II. Humour, satire, parody

The European traditions of locally flavoured comedy, parody humour, picaresque novels, or antihero comics also began to stand out as notable features of European videogame production in the 1980s and 1990s (Pérez-Latorre, 2013). A significant precursor was Codemasters' *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator*, a parody lawn mower simulator, the source code of which was originally published in *Your Sinclair* magazine. Donovan (2010, pp. 115–118) highlighted the notable presence of surreal humour in the first era of British videogames, with examples such as *Manic Miner* (Bug-Byte, 1983) and *Jet Set Willy* (Software Projects), which at various times were evocative of the humour of Monty Python. Other works with a particular humoristic touch were *Everyone is a Wally* (Mikro Gen, 1985), which starred anti-heroes such as a mechanic and an electrician, who the player had to help simply 'survive' a normal working day, and *Skool Daze* (David Reidy, 1985), which was about a boy who the player helped to pull pranks at school and, ultimately, steal his report from the principal's office.

The Spanish videogame of the 80s was also characterised by its commitment to humour and parody. *La Pulga*, the first commercialised Spanish videogame (Indescomp, 1983), already contained a parodic science-fiction introduction (the narrative premise being the space accident of a flea who is the pilot of the space probe 'Onion X7'). *Sir Fred* (Made in Spain, 1986) starred a long-nosed, big-bellied medieval knight, and *Abu Simbel Profanation* (Dinamic Software, 1985) portrayed a protagonist, Johny [sic] Jones, whose name evoked Indiana Jones but who simply appeared on the screen as a pixelated two-legged ball with eyes. Pretext of the game being that Johny Jones had been the victim of a curse that had reduced his body to just his potato nose (on the history and imaginaries of Spanish videogames of the 1980s, see Esteve, 2012, and Fernández-Vara's chapter in this book).

Later, the British designer Peter Molyneux would build a reputation as a creator of ironic simulators: *Black & White* (Lionhead Studios, 2001) can be defined as a 'God simulator' where the player's challenge is to knead a collection of religious fanatics, and *The Movies* (Lionhead Studios, 2005) is a humoristic simulation of the Hollywood film industry. But it is surely *Grand Theft Auto*, originally created by Scottish studio DMA Design (now Rockstar North) in 1998, that is the most popular European videogame satire: a sarcastic macro-tale of the American dream and of how violence and moral degradation end up being essential for getting out of the 'well' of poverty or debt in a supposedly free city full of neon lights, as in this famous 'replica' of New York that is Liberty City.

### III. Euro-strategy

If there is a pre-existing European ‘seal’ in the game culture, it is that of the ‘Eurogame’ board games. The concept ‘Eurogame’ refers to a type of board game whose origin and main references are German, although it has spread throughout Europe and become a kind of ‘European style’ in board game design. ‘Eurogames’ are commonly designed to play with the family and are characterised by a gameplay without narrative pretensions (in the strong sense of the term), and where victory does not consist in ‘destroying’ the other, but generally in obtaining more points than rival players in a ‘comparative’ competition (Woods, 2012; see also Anton Planells’ chapter in this book). Some classic references are *Carcassonne*, *Alhambra*, and *Catan*. The Eurogame style is best understood by contrasting it with the disparagingly labelled ‘*ameritrash*’: board games that simulate fantasy worlds, proposing fictional roles and experiences of narrative evasion, usually linked to niches of fan culture (science fiction, Tolkien, Lovecraft, etc.), and often based on mechanics of action and violent confrontation. The latter is particularly significant since the origin of the Eurogame is linked to Germany’s particular sensitivity—for historical reasons—to games that glorify violence and war. This was a determining factor for exploring and consolidating a strategic but non-warmongering style of board game, oriented towards mechanics of construction, management, resource optimisation, etc.

The popularity of the strategy game in Germany is reflected in the videogame world through strategy and management sagas such as *Anno* (Sunflowers, 1998–), *Settlers* (Bluebyte, 1993), *Farming simulator* (Giants Software, 2008–), and the browser-based *OGame* (Gameforge, 2002). Certainly, some of these videogames have a relevant component of war strategy, and in this sense they do not fit into the canonical pattern of the Eurogame, but in any case they are unmarked by the ‘tangible’ realistic violence of first-person shooters in the videogame context. On the other hand, in recent years the mobile games of the Finnish company Supercell, *Clash of Clans* (2012) and *Clash Royale* (2016), have become hugely popular. These games involve direct confrontation with an enemy, which is to be eliminated, along with other features closer to the Eurogame, such as the importance of mechanics of management, construction, and optimisation of resources, cartoon aesthetics, and the spirit of casual play.

Finally, as a bridge between the previous point and the strategy game, it should be remembered that in the 1990s a kind of European sub-genre of videogames became popular: the ‘strategic comedy’ (Pérez-Latorre, 2013). Distancing themselves from the great civilising races (*Civilization*, *Age of*



*Empires*) and epic battles in science fiction worlds (*Starcraft*), some European studios infused humour and comedy into the strategy videogame: *North & South*, from the French company Infogrames (1989) and based on the eponymous comic, included visual gags between contests; *Lemmings* (DMA Design, 1991) replaced the usual armies with a group of cute green-haired creatures; and *Worms* (Team 17) posed almost surreal skirmishes between two groups of worms who were Rambo fans.

#### IV. Euro-indianness and authorship

Long before the rewriting of the videogame indie culture in the documentary *Indie Game: The Movie* (Swirsky & Pajot, 2012), indie games already existed and their epicentre was located in Europe, in particular in the UK. The phenomenon of the 'bedroom coders' in the 1980s was marked by the success of young amateurs, from Matthew Smith to Ultimate Play the Game, who conquered the imaginary of microcomputers. However, this was an indie movement far different from the current one in the sense that it did not have such a marked artistic, anti-mainstream, and/or 'alternative' discourse on the part of the creators, nor an institutional ecosystem surrounding it such as surrounds the indie movement today (indie festivals, indie communities, etc.). More than with the romantic idea of the 'author videogame', the European pre-indie was connected to the demo-scene: communities of programming fans who played to *crack* computer games, who inserted pirate *intros* at the beginning of the games, and who would meet to hold competitions to do so. In countries such as Czechoslovakia, Italy, the Netherlands, and Finland, the demo scene was very popular in the late 1970s and throughout much of the 1980s, giving European videogame culture a remarkable community component and a connection to hacker culture.

Regarding the artistic discourse of independent authorship, Pierre Bourdieu (1992) traced its genesis in the French bohemia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a cultural style that would be renewed in the *politique des auteurs* of French cinema from 1950s onwards. We can find certain echoes of this in the history of the European videogame: behind the above-mentioned 'French touch' of the 1980s both social commentary and a certain emphasis on authorship merged; later on, in March 2006, the French government was a pioneer in awarding a Medal of the Arts to videogame authors Michel Ancel, Frederick Raynal, and Shigeru Miyamoto. The same year, the Manifesto of the Belgian artists Tale of Tales included a second 'commandment' that explicitly said: 'Be an author'. Anecdotally, in the special edition of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Another World* (Delphine Software, 1991), Eric Chahi included a small



documentary on the creative process of the game, reminiscent of a behind-the-scenes making of film; a probably unprecedented gesture that fuelled the projection of his game and of himself as a ‘cult’ work/author. Finally, some of the most successful forerunners of the contemporary indie game, shortly before its 2011–2013 commercial boom, were Nordic creators and companies, such as Mojang (*Minecraft*, 2009), Petri Purho (*Crayon Physics*, 2009), and Playdead (*Limbo*, 2010). However, so far the artistic indie game discourse has, paradoxically, had its most influential manifestation in the aforementioned documentary *Indie Game: The Movie* (2012), starring North American creators (on indie games and authorship, see Juul, 2019, and Mercè Oliva’s chapter in this book).

## V. Other traits (and the question of national diversity)

Undoubtedly, a fundamental feature of the European videogame is related to national diversity and the strong historical and cultural idiosyncrasies of the different European countries, which are reflected in their videogames, although perhaps, as we will discuss, not as much as would be expected.

A clear example can be seen in the communist countries, which in the 1970s and 1980s had different cultural and commercial dynamics than other European countries. Thus, the origins of the videogame in places such as Czechoslovakia, East Germany, or Russia (USSR), were characterised by the dynamism of their programmer communities and trade restrictions, accompanied by particular piracy dynamics, and a strong state involvement, either related to training initiatives or adaptation/localisation of content, according to government criteria (Svelch, 2018; Vacek, 2015; Lange & Liebe, 2015; Fedorov, 2015).

The role of Finland and the Scandinavian countries is linked to the historic influence of Nokia, which can still be noted today in the relevance of the mobile gaming sector in this part of Europe, from *Angry Birds* (Rovio, 2009/Finland) to the more recent successes of the Swedish company King (*Candy Crush*), and the Finnish Supercell (*Clash of Clans*, *Clash Royale*) (Supercell was bought by the Chinese publisher Tencent in 2016). Moreover, there is a certain polarity of production styles in these countries: the contrast between ‘dreams’ of AAA productions and highly influential indie companies. Thus, Nordic blockbusters such as *Hitman* (IO Interactive, 2000–), *Battlefield* (DICE, 2002–), and *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, 2001–) coexist with small cult creations such as *Limbo* and *Inside* (Playdead, 2010, 2016) (Mäyrä, 2015, pp. 165–166). In another order of things, Denmark and Finland also stand out for the crucial role played by their universities (IT University of



Copenhagen, University of Tampere, etc.) in first promoting Game Studies, the study of videogames as cultural and aesthetic objects.

In Italy, iconic companies such as Simulmondo and Milestone based their success on creating videogames that respond to traditional passions of the Italian public: soccer, sports, motor racing, and motorcycling, along with videogame adaptations of cult Italian comics, such as *Dylan Dog* (Simulmondo, 1992–1999). More recently, gamification and serious games have also had a prominent presence in Italy, through companies such as Spinvector and TiconBlu. E-sports, through pioneering companies such as NGI, have got a strong position in the national industry and wide public following (Gandolfi, 2015). In the Netherlands, companies oriented towards serious games, such as V-Step, E-semble, Ranj Serious, and Grendel games, have played a leading role in recent years, practically overshadowing companies oriented towards conventional videogame entertainment (van Grinsven & Raessens, 2015, p. 364). In Russia, beyond the iconic *Tetris*, the production of online games, videogames linked to social media, and casual videogames for mobile phones currently predominates through companies such as Crazy Panda and Zeptolab. Finally, Central and Eastern European creators have a more visible presence in the continent in recent years, with remarkable successes in both mainstream and indie fields, such as the videogames of the transmedia franchise *The Witcher* (Poland, CD Projekt RED, 2007–) and Amanita Design's artistic games (Czech Republic, 2003–).

Nevertheless, some authors point out a certain shortage of narratives based on national history and folklore in the creation of videogames. Enrico Gandolfi (2015: 310) highlights this with some irony: Italian culture has provided references and inspiration to very diverse emblematic creations in the history of the videogame: Super Mario, Ezio Auditore, the stories of the mafia, and *Rome: Total War* (UK, Creative Assembly, 2004–); however, paradoxically, the history of Italy and Italian folklore have a (comparatively) rather poor resonance in the productions of Italian companies. Regarding Finland, Frans Mäyrä (2015, p. 165) has also pointed out that its most popular productions function fundamentally as pastiches of international references (film noir plus the bullet-time of *Matrix* in *Max Payne*, for example). As a possible factor behind this it is worth observing that, all over Europe, it seems that in the specific training programmes for videogame creation, technical (and business) competences tend to predominate, while humanistic training has a far smaller presence. Some recent examples, by way of exception, are *Year Walk* (Simogo, 2013), a horror walking simulator based on the old Swedish tradition called *Arsgang*, and *Blasphemous* (Game Kitchen, 2019), a Spanish videogame inspired by Goya's pictorial imagery.



## The many faces of the European videogame: an overview of this book

This brief introduction does not aim to be a comprehensive portrait or conceptualisation of what can be called the European videogame, but an invitation to think about it and its very existence as a concept. And this, again, is the endeavour of this book and the challenge we posed to the contributors: not to centre on a single object seeking for a unitarian definition, but to explore the many ways we can inquire into the Europeanness of games made in the continent, to interrogate them from many different European perspectives and traditions, and to problematise this cultural space as something different from America and Japan without reducing it to a false homogeneity. It is far from our intention to describe what a European videogame should be. We are looking for diversity in dialogue, for the formation of a shared cultural space, for (multi)local agency within an industry and a culture that are, from its inception and in its many practices, highly transnational.

With these goals in mind and keeping in mind the challenges of European game studies described by Torill Mortensen in the prologue, the book is divided into two main sections. The first is dedicated to 'national stories' that illustrate, in several ways, the many peculiarities and even eccentricities of game production and gaming culture in different European countries, from underground works to idiosyncratic uses of platforms. Although not strictly limited to a historical approach, history is a very important part of this section, as its authors look back to foundational moments where videogames were not fully established as a cultural industry and intra-European exchanges were even less common than they are today. As such, these chapters show a fragmented and disconnected Europe, one in which videogames began growing in parallel, heavily influenced both by American and Japanese games and local traditions.

In the first chapter, Clara Fernández-Vara uses the concept of 'national games' to address what distinguishes Spanish videogames and how they express a historical and cultural identity. With this, Fernández Vara shows an example of how 'national games' precede 'European videogames'. In a similar note, Alexis Blanchett explores, in the second chapter, the cultural specificities of French videogames in the 1980s and their creative sources, in particular the social commentary and 'caricatural' humour in the adventure genre. The unlikely success of the Japanese microcomputer Sharp MZ-800 in Communist-era Czechoslovakia is the focus of the third chapter, in which Jaroslav Švelch studies this 'minor platform' through a combination of platform





studies, feminist critique, and the microhistories of individual users. Many European countries, as this chapter shows, entered the videogame industry as secondary markets for international forces, often unplanned and even unmanaged. This resulted in many amateur productions, where the lack of funding and expertise was compensated by a freer take on themes and tone. As an example of this, in the fourth chapter, Susanna Paasonen and Veli-Matti Karhulahti take a look at the development and history of Finnish pre-Internet DIY labour through the study of 'fuck games': amateur productions dealing with sexually explicit content. Some of the chapters in this section are the first time their subjects have been approached, or at least provide initial investigations of these subjects from a scholarly perspective. The European videogame has seldom been historicised. Museums have a very important part to play in filling that gap, and Europe is, thankfully, rising up to the challenge. To name a few, Berlin has the Computerspiele Museum, Rome the VIGAMUS (Video Game Museum of Rome), and Tampere the Finnish Museum of Games, which are dedicated exclusively to national productions. That is why we close this section with James Newman, writing from his double perspective as a scholar and as the curator of the National Videogame Archive of the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford. Newman questions the rigidity of videogames as an object by discussing ports and clones, focusing on a minor European platform, the Dragon 32 computer, and its many versions of Donkey Kong and Cuthbert games. Here we see, again, not a clear set of European-specific traits in local productions but a challenge to the very idea of the 'European videogame', with a palimpsest of games and intellectual properties written across a vast tapestry of international hardware. If we are to arrive at a shared European game culture, we need to start with the often messy and unruly national stories and histories in Europe.

And yet, the European videogame, however feeble in its structure and identity, exists beyond atomised national spaces. The second section brings together several transnational approaches that highlight connections in the continent. In the sixth chapter, Manuel Garin studies the many adaptations of two iconic European comic books, *Asterix* and *Tintin*, made by international teams across Europe. Not only are these games developed by intra-European teams, but they use franchises and characters beloved in many European countries and come from a cultural industry where Europeanness is a clearer descriptor: comic books. Hergé, Uderzo and Goscinny, Pratt, and Ibáñez are undoubtedly European. Could the same be said about European gamemakers? Mercè Oliva analyses, in the seventh chapter, how European videogames deal with 'authorism' and 'auteur politics', and how these ideas shape how European creators see work and creative authority and power.





European culture has its own coordinates, and philosophy is a central part of that. That is why this section includes a proposal to understand games from European philosophical perspectives. In the seventh chapter, Stefano Gualeni and Daniel Vella introduce the concept of ‘existential ludology’, a distinct European tradition that theorises games through the lens of existential philosophy, studying how digital games reflect the system of thought in which they emerged. In a similar vein, Anton Planells studies, in the ninth chapter, how European board games set in Europe use the structural metaphors of simulation to reflect on the individual evolution of the European subject and its circumstances. Finally, in the tenth chapter, Nelson Zagalo considers how realism and drama have been used in European games and, in particular, how the past decade has brought about productions that can be considered ‘naturalistic’. If the first section showed a fragmented and chaotic European game space, this section underscores the connections, the possibilities, the dialogues.

Historically, Europe has not had its own established hardware platforms beyond the microcomputers of the 1980s or rare attempts at the console market like the Overkal or the Nokia N-Gage, nor has it had many major publishers in the industry. But, above all, it has never had its own ‘story’, a defined and recognisable supranational narrative through which it can understand its past, find new motivations, and build its own mythology, with benchmark works, companies, and creators. As Torill Mortensen shows in the introduction, Europe has a long history of studying games, shaping the field of game studies, and creating bridges for intellectual exchange, but so far the scholars of this space have not tackled the ludo-histories of the ludic Europe. The aim of this book is precisely to contribute to the creation of this so far non-existent yet so necessary story: a story of self-reflection for the European videogame.

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