

Review: Perspectives on the European Videogame, edited by Victor Navarro-Remesal and Óliver Pérez-Latorre. 2021. Amsterdam University Press. 236 pp.

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Videogame development has historically been attributed to Japan and the United States, with the former having the major software and hardware developers, Sony and Nintendo, and the latter playing host to Microsoft, the developers of Xbox and Windows for PC. This has historically left Europe in a situation of being seen as the “third wheel” of the industry. However, this has also meant that European videogames were able to create their own identity as cultural artefacts. Victor Navarro-Remesal and Óliver Pérez-Latorre are clear that within *Perspectives on the European Videogame*, they are not looking to define what a “European videogame” is, but rather open discussions around the interpretation of the videogame medium in Europe. The book is divided into two parts, each with five chapters. The first part focuses on the history of game production within different European countries, while the second one explores the culture and transnational themes present within and surrounding videogames in Europe.

Part I of the anthology looks at how the game industry in Europe has been able to develop its own games since the 1970s, giving rise to the indie scene and laying the foundation for transnational and transcultural development within Europe. Each chapter discusses a notable development trend within a specific country, covering gameplay genres such as Spanish football simulation, Finnish “fuck games,” and British “clone games.”

Chapter 1 and 2 are focused primarily on national videogame cultures of the 1980s, and how developers both utilised and became aware of the potential of the videogame format. Clara Fernández-Vara and Alexis Blanchet address the development culture of the 1980s in Spain and France; how Hollywood movies, national icons, and comic books affected

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game design; and how videogames were seen in these two countries. Fernández-Vara notes that Spanish videogames can be distinguished from those of other countries through four key themes: “cultural appropriation, celebration of Spanish sports, heroic parody, and national Spanish themes” (p. 45). Blanchet examines the early French videogame industry and the many influences that were prevalent within videogames, such as comics, horror tropes, celebrity caricatures, and how France’s stance on play as a key form of child development helped develop its national industry.

Chapter 3 and 4 also examine two different national videogame cultures—this time, Finland and Czechoslovakia—but provide a stronger emphasis on independent development. In Chapter 3, Susanna Paasonen and Veli-Matti Karhulahti discuss the genre of Finnish “fuck games,” i.e., games that are sexually explicit but “are not concerned with depictions of desire” and “exhibit little aesthetic or artistic intent” (p. 76). These include games that reimagine *Space Invaders*’ (Taito, 1978) science fiction imagery into a penis shooting into orifices. Then, in Chapter 4, Jaroslav Švelch analyses the role of the MZ-800 in Czechoslovakia, specifically how the government sponsored computer clubs to encourage software development due to the lack of software support from Sharp.

In Chapter 5, James Newman focuses not on a specific geographical culture, but instead on porting and converting games, such as the *Platform 14* (2019-present) exhibit at the National Videogame Museum in England. This exhibit is a collection of different versions of *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) across 14 different platforms. Within these different variants, Newman examines the *Cuthbert* series (MicroDeal, 1983–1985), a British series that includes *Monkey Kong* (MicroDeal, 1983), a clone of the aforementioned *Donkey Kong*. By concentrating on *Donkey Kong* and its derivatives (both official and not), Newman’s work questions whether references to a specific videogame also include its subsequent ports and clones.

While Part I addresses the cultural uniqueness of a selected group of European countries’ early videogame development, Part II distinguishes transnational approaches and connections within the broader European game industry. The chapters within this section cover a host of transcultural influences, such as adaptation, naturalism, and even philosophical views of the videogame.

Chapter 6 and 7 cover auteurism and adaptation, two concepts that involve utilising an individual’s work as a selling point. Mercè Oliva’s chapter analyses both independent and big-budget studios, asking “how indie and AAA games claim the ‘author function’” (p. 133) and how they utilise this to market and produce their videogames. Oliva looks at how high-budget and independent games are addressed, and how they are viewed in terms of cultural quality. This is done by highlighting

prominent European auteurs such as Arnt Jensen and David Cage. On the other hand, Manuel Garin's work discusses two legendary intellectual properties—*Asterix* (Goscinny & Uderzo, 1959-present) and *Tintin* (Hergé, 1929–1976)—arguing for “the cultural and historical value of adaptation in a field, videogames, prone to defensive attitudes concerning medium specificity” (p. 153). When highlighting the early development of adaptations during the 1980s, Garin poses questions about transnational relations, such as how teams in different countries see the *Asterix* series, and how development teams across borders are linked by a love for a pre-existing intellectual property.

Chapter 8 and 10 represent a more philosophical viewing of videogames and the representation of narrative elements within a gameworld. Stefano Gualeni and Daniel Vella discuss Norwegian metaphysician Peter Wessel Zappfe's work on existential philosophy and how it applies to our understanding of digital gameworlds and the “existential mechanisms analogous to those by which we engage with the actual world” (p. 176). According to Gualeni and Vella, Zappfe's work suggests that videogames which depict a lived experience are a way of sublimating existential panic. In Chapter 10, by using European videogames such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Warhorse Studios, 2018), Zagolo theorises that there has been a recent movement towards more naturalism in games via the inclusion of more realistic drama. Zagolo argues that naturalism, as implemented within a gameworld, is represented as life existing in an environment where the main character experiments with elements of the world.

In contrast to previous chapters, Chapter 9 discusses analogue games. Here, Antonio José Planells de la Maza highlights how European analogue games “reflect the multiple European realities” (p. 196) that have existed across history through a combination of their themes and mechanics. Compared to previous chapters, there is a heavier focus on the fragmented culture of European countries and how these are used in board games, such as *Polis: Fight for the Hegemony* (Asylum Games, 2012), which draws inspiration from the Athens-Sparta wars of ancient Greece. Whilst Planells de la Maza's work is fascinating and highlights similar themes to those within the rest of the book, its inclusion in a book otherwise focused entirely on digital games leaves it feeling slightly out of place.

Paramount to the book's premise, each chapter addresses a different culture or game form, using this variety to conclude that there “probably will never be, a clear or single definition of European identity” (p. 228). This conclusion is logical given the large number of topics covered within the book, as each chapter adds a new perspective and a new argument as to what constitutes a European videogame. However, although it opens the conversation for European videogames to be seen, the individual chapters all bring about new opinions that do not always substantiate each other. Each piece opens a new angle on the concept of

European videogames and moves swiftly to another. The topic itself is thought-provoking and warrants further research, but the book would have been stronger had it been more focused on either of its two main sections.

Overall, *Perspectives on the European Videogame* is a fantastic introductory text and incorporates a strong sense of purpose and knowledge from a wide range of scholars from across Europe. It provides new insight into a topic that could become hotly debated over the next few years. *Perspectives on the European Videogame* has great potential to serve as a productive text for scholars researching the question of what truly makes a videogame European, thereby meeting one of the editors' fundamental objectives. The book achieves this by presenting a wide range of geographical, political, and social research.

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