Review: *Who Are You? Nintendo's Game Boy Advance Platform*, by Alex Custodio. 2020. MIT Press. ix + 270 pp.

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Alex Custodio's 2020 book, *Who Are You? Nintendo's Game Boy Advance Platform,* offers, through a historical and cultural lens, discussion on the successes and inspiration behind Nintendo's 2002 launch of the Game Boy Advance (GBA). Using concepts of embodiment, social circulation, materiality of nostalgia, and the practicality of handheld gaming consoles, Custodio builds on platform studies to explain how the GBA has moved beyond its intended use of being portable. Custodio's book is divided into six chapters which each offers historical, cultural, and social aspects of the GBA system's legacy to the gaming industry.

Chapter 1 and 2 highlight the creation, design, and inspiration behind Nintendo's marketing and design for the GBA platform. Both chapters delve into the material aspects of the GBA, examining its physical design, form factor, and the materials used in its construction. Custodio analyzes how the GBA's aesthetic and ergonomics contribute to the overall user experience. Furthermore, the two chapters explain the need for a portable handheld people could use during their train ride commute, and how Nintendo wanted to make a device that had sufficient battery life without the need for people to carry spare batteries or charge the devices often.

Chapter 3 introduces a more archeological perspective by researching gaming consoles' physical state and their interaction with players. Custodio uses the "patina" methodology adopted from antiquarians to understand how the player engaged with the console and how evidence of human interaction is on the used gaming console. In conjunction with Melanie Swalwell's (2008) comment on "kinesthetic knowledge" (p. 102), Custodio emphasizes that game scholars should pay closer attention to the immersive aspects of gaming. This includes observing how players move, hold, and position themselves when using the GBA platform.

Chapter 4 explores how popular game franchises, such as Pokémon (1996—present), presented the opportunity for players to invite people into their gaming space. Custodio notes that the GBA became a popular console thanks to its portability, which allowed players to play their favorite video games in different spaces and not confine themselves to the living room. The chapter offers a strong analysis of the distinction between public and private gaming and how this is determined by the space and nature of the game.

Chapter 5 describes how the rise of emulators and ROMs began as a response to Nintendo permanently closing their Wii Shop Channel, resulting in players no longer having access to their favorite classic games on the Wii system. This is an intriguing point to consider in how it highlights the connection between technological innovation and older hardwares becoming obsolete, a process that can often lead to a loss of access to any features that made the platform unique. However, Custodio points out that emulators provide players with more options for interacting with video games than is possible when restricted by the original hardware. According to them, "one of the most appealing features of many video game emulators is the ability to save and load a current emulation state, regardless of whether the game offers the player the option to save at that point (or at all)" (p. 147). Thus, emulation has transformed the way players experience video games to this day.

Lastly, Chapter 6 explores fan-generated content by researching GBA's afterlife through homebrewing, hacking, and hardware modding. Custodio discusses how technological innovation means that new handheld platforms will be made, raising concerns about how our old devices are disposed of or repurposed. Therefore, this chapter offers productive ways to think about consumption and e-waste produced by constant innovation and planned obsolescence.

Overall, Custodio argues for alternative perspectives in the field of platform studies. In the book's introduction, Custodio clarifies that platform studies are not restricted to studying platforms as computational systems: The field explores the creative work that is programmed on them, rather than limiting and tailoring them to experienced players. Custodio builds upon this argument by using the GBA slogan "Who Are You?" to explain how the GBA system has become both a historical and cultural artifact in gaming history. For example, *Pokémon Ruby Version* and *Pokémon Sapphire Version* (Game Freak, 2002) present opportunities for players to exchange Pokémon that are exclusive to each version via the GBA Link Cable. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past and Four Swords* (Nintendo EAD, 2003) also provides the space for players to link their GBA's up and work together to fight enemies and feel a sense of community and triumph as they defeat the evil wizard Vaati. Custodio explains how the legacy of the GBA has created a materiality of nostalgia and argues that Nintendo's brand is

built on this nostalgia and players wanting to reclaim their experiences with past Nintendo products.

In Chapter 3, Custodio explores how scholars use different methods when researching hardware in gaming devices. For example, some researchers have analyzed the stability of joysticks in the arcade version of *Pac-Man* (Atari, 1983). Within their findings, the arcade game showed signs of human interaction, such as dead skin. This not only demonstrates how "games leave emotional impressions on players, [but how players] leave physical impressions on their handhelds" (p. 93). Here, the design and material used to make the GBA mattered because of who was going to use the device and where. A harder plastic material means more resistance to damage from constant use or a fall. Chapter 2 specifically refers to how Nintendo kept in mind their "image-conscious consumer" back in the early 2000s (p. 81) when the company wanted to offer the same experience as the GBA, only as a smaller device. Thus, the Game Boy Micro was created as Nintendo's smallest handheld console, so small that people could carry it in their keychains.

Another layer to the conversations around platforms is how handheld consoles redefined our ideas of public and private spaces. The book successfully addresses this by integrating the idea of shared gaming experiences. According to Custodio, purchasing a GBA meant using a console where the player invites others to view and share their video game experiences. If we consider how the "rhetorical role enacted by artifacts, especially their rhetorical agency, defined by the ability to act and shape attitudes in the world" (Fleckenstein, 2016, p. 126), then this encourages us to think about how people use the handheld device for more than just individual or private gameplay. Besides allowing others to watch you play, you can also invite them to play on your device or team up with fellow game cartridge owners for multiplayer quests. In Chapter 4 and 5, Custodio discusses this social engagement, emphasizing how the GBA platform fosters a setting where players must interact to progress in certain levels or game modes. In other words, not only does the GBA expand the player's own identity, but it also extends the player's social skills in the world.

Who Are You? by Custodio offers more than information on the hardware, software, and marketing aspects of Nintendo's handheld consoles: The book proposes new ways to think about how portable gaming consoles represented a way for people to engage in public and private spaces. The option to personalize a handheld console also demonstrates how these consoles embodied an extension of a person's identity. Scholars from rhetoric studies can look at this book as an example of how platform studies are in conversation with material rhetoric, since both fields study how artifacts are shaped and changed from their original use into a new one. Furthermore, this book expands on ongoing conversations in media archaeology, game history, and platform studies. Custodio's arguments work in conjunction with other

scholars such as David Sheff (1994) and Tom Bissell (2010), whose work expands discussions on Nintendo's popularity and impact on video game culture, as well as how video games form part of our socialization in the world. *Who Are You?* highlights how the GBA lives on through the collective memory and nostalgia of players who want to keep using the handheld platform, either by means of hacking and using emulators, or using a handheld that brings back the enjoyment of using the GBA.

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