

In Search of Lost Gameplay

My first computer was a Commodore 64C. I cannot quite remember the first game I played but *High Noon*, *Boulder Dash* or *Commando* are likely candidates. I can remember their visuals and sounds, their mechanics and level designs but also the lengthy loading process and the commands one had to type to start the adventure. My memories of games are inseparable from their material dimension – the sturdy black QuickShot joystick and the satisfying click of its red buttons, the old cassettes with weird-sounding game titles scribbled on them and the Commodore 1530 Datasette that we put them into. But even then, the long-lost world is not complete. I have to mention my sister and dad who were right there with me, trying to figure out what to do in the games. Without any manuals or original packaging, we made up our own narratives influenced by the late 1980s 'panelák' society we lived in. And let's not forget my school friends who supplied me with a steady stream of pirated titles. They shaped not only what I played, but also how I played. All these aspects, some true and some perhaps unconsciously distorted constitute the magical memories of my childhood gameplay. Can we ever truly recreate these experiences? The answer is: No, for many reasons.

The primary goal of many game archivists, to play historical games on original hardware, is proving unsustainable. Even if we had a magical warehouse full of spare parts, only a few memory institutions could afford to maintain a collection of functional historical hardware. Emulation seemed like a logical and relatively easy way out until game historians realized it brought new challenges: it does not solve but creates new legal issues; one still needs the original peripherals to reach minimum fidelity; as it is often impossible to identify the original version of a game, we do not really know what features we should preserve to consider the emulation successful, etc. In 2012, James Newman (without rejecting the previous methods) argued that recreating historically authentic gameplay experiences has always been a fool's errand and that the „play is not the outcome of game preservation but is its object“. The goal is not just to have a playable game, but well-documented gameplay from the time the game was actively played. Soon after that, Melanie Swalwell emphasized that for such

meaningful documentation we need to assemble a wide range of primary and secondary sources like design documents, source code, magazines, consumer products, gameplay videos, online forums, fan fictions, etc. Niklas Nylund recently suggested that the 'holistic game preservation' consists of all three layers: objects, experiences and context. Other game scholars have criticized the exclusiveness of existing game collections. We will never achieve complete historical accuracy with digital games, but that is true of other memory projects as well. However, if we give up on gameplay preservation, we will lose a large and ever-growing part of our culture (and ourselves) forever.

We will be revisiting this topic from a local perspective in the Interview section, but before that, this issue offers a number of other exciting topics from the world of games and digital gaming. Sina Torabi applies Aristotle's *Poetics* to the game *The Last of Us Part II* to examine a tragedy in the context of digital game narratives. The use of game design and technology in urban planning is explored by Paul Cureton and Paul Coulton. Adeline Loh deals with the issues of body politics and disability representation within the game *Yakuza 0*. Dinko Jukić examines the phenomenon of trophies in digital games from various perspectives. The issues of market position and monetisation of the digital version of the trading card game *Pokémon TCG* are examined by Miroslav Macák. Maximos S. Theodoropoulos reflects on the origins of digital games and their development in Greece. Daniela De Angeli investigates the various purposes of escape rooms beyond entertainment. And the last study, by Tomáš Farkaš, focuses on the auditory space of digital games, with a view to the design of audio games for the visually impaired.

In the following section, the books *The Performance of videogames* by Kelly I. Aliano and *The child in videogames* by Emma Reay and the digital game *Suicide Squad: Kill the Justice League* are reviewed. The issue concludes with Walter Barta reflecting on whether we are living in a computer game in the Add-ons section.

I wish all readers of the current issue of *Acta Ludologica* an engaging and informative read.

Jan Kremer

Národní filmový archiv in Prague, Czech Republic

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