



VIA
PANORAMICA

Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos
A Journal of Anglo-American Studies

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON GAME STUDIES

Victorian and American Frames of
Reference for Digital Games

THEMATIC SECTION

Introduction to Thematic Section

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Almost two decades ago, in his 2008 book *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*, Frans Mäyrä argued that games had become incredibly popular. According to Mäyrä, the rapid rise of digital media and information technologies had made games “one of the most fascinating uses for these new interactive devices” (4). As a powerful cultural force, games had come to play a prominent role in the lives of people in industrialized countries, and the game industry had grown into “a global creative powerhouse” (Mäyrä 2008, 4), worth more than 30 billion dollars annually. In the fifth edition of *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, published in 2024, even though the book was originally released in 2008, Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca describe a world where games and play have become “ever-present” (1). As they put it, “[i]n the historical blink of an eye, video games have colonized our minds and invaded our screens . . . video games have exploded exponentially . . . until they are now everywhere, from tiny mobile phone displays to ostentatious wall-mounted plasma TVs” (2). In 2026, games continue to endure, permeating everyday life in various ways.

The popularity of games has been accompanied by the emergence of game studies, which in 2008 was still a relatively young field, not widely recognized as a proper discipline, as Mäyrä explained (4). Regardless of this, by the time Mäyrä’s book was published, game studies had already become established both as a topic of academic research and as a branch of study taught at universities, with its own object of inquiry (games and play), as well as its own terminology, theories, and methods. During the first decade of the millennium, an expanding community of theorists also dedicated their time to conducting research, publishing journals, and organizing conferences on games (Mäyrä 2008, 4). For their part, Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca, writing in 2024, trace

16 the development of game studies to its “humble beginnings in the 1980s” (3), followed by an acceleration in the study of games that mirrored the rapid increase in their popularity. Since the late twentieth century, several publications have proposed new theoretical frameworks, and the field itself has “grown into a coherent and established player” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, and Tosca 2024, 3), with research also growing in quantity and quality. Dom Ford’s *Mytholudics: Games and Myth*, released in 2025, is one example of recent scholarship on games.

The pervasiveness of games and game studies becomes evident when considering that what was originally intended as a single thematic section at the International Conference on Victorian and American Myths in Video Games had to be divided into two sections due to the high number of submitted articles. As in the previous thematic section, this one brings together articles that explore American and Victorian frames of reference in relation to games, beginning with Giorgi Razmadze’s and Diogo Oliveira’s articles, respectively entitled “Waste Labor and Capitalist Mythology in Total Refusal’s *Hardly Working*” and “Pikachu Goes West: A Cultural Analysis of *Pokémon*’s Western Adaptation”. While Razmadze focuses on *Hardly Working* (2022), which appropriates *Red Dead Redemption II* (2018) and relates to the myth of the frontier, Oliveira considers *Pokémon* and its Americanization. Maria João Brito’s “‘Come, Watson! The Game is Afoot!’: *Sherlock Holmes*. An Adventure in Videogames” is next, delving into the realm of Victorian Britain, tracing the adaptation of the celebrated detective Sherlock Holmes and his mythos into video games over the past four decades. The articles close with Rui Mateus’s “Mapping Middle-earth: Cartographic Representations and Transmedia Storytelling in *The Lord of the Rings Online*”, which examines the online ludic instantiation of Tolkien’s fantasy world.

The articles are followed by a segment dedicated to Ford, one of the conference’s keynote speakers. Besides being an editor of *Eludamos*, Ford is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Digital Narrative at the University of Bergen, as part of the LEAD AI program. Previously, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bremen, within the Media and Religion lab at the ZeMKI Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research, after finishing his PhD at the IT University of Copenhagen’s Center for Digital Play (“about me”, n.d.). His first book, mentioned above, was published by De Gruyter, and a review of it is included in this thematic section, along with an interview I conducted with Ford at the conference on his new book.

I would like to conclude this introduction by acknowledging the work and assistance of all those who gave up some of their time to make sure these two thematic sections of *VIA PANORAMICA* were published. First, I am profoundly grateful to Joana Caetano, the journal's executive editor, for inviting Jéssica Bispo and me to guest-edit the thematic sections of *VIA PANORAMICA* dedicated to the conference. It was a privilege to work under Joana's guidance, and I thank her for all her patience and support. Next, I thank Jéssica Bispo, who agreed to guest-edit this thematic section with me, as well as the peer reviewers, whose contributions were essential to improving the articles submitted to the journal. I am also deeply grateful to Ford, who agreed to be interviewed for this thematic section and who never refused to offer me feedback whenever I requested it, always with thoughtfulness and generosity. Finally, I thank the authors themselves for entrusting us with their work. I hope the final result is as satisfying for everyone involved as it has been for me.

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HOW TO CITE

Pereira, Teresa (2026). "Introduction to thematic section: From the Victorian Era to the American Experiment: Mythic Foundational Narratives in Video Games. Vol. 2". *VIA PANORAMICA: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, vol. 15, n.º 1, 2026, pp. 15-17. Web: <http://ojs.letras.up.pt/>. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21747/2182-9934/via15_1in