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# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON GAME STUDIES

Victorian and American Frames of  
Reference for Digital Games

THEMATIC SECTION

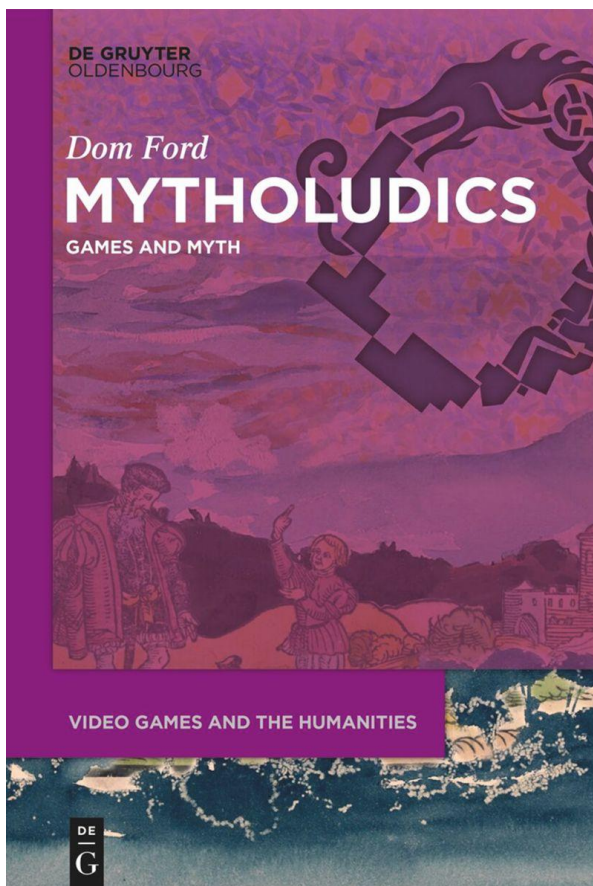
Ford, Dom. *Mytholudics: Games and Myth*.

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While the discipline of game studies, generally defined by Frans Mäyrä as “a multidisciplinary field of study and learning with games and related phenomena as its subject matter” (2008, 6), can arguably no longer be considered new, all those venturing into it have probably been confronted with the methodological dilemma of how to analyze a game. The study of games has existed for quite some time, especially within the disciplines of history and ethnography, as demonstrated by classic works such as *Games of the North American Indians* and *A History of Chess*, published respectively by Stewart Culin (1858-1929) in 1907 and Harold James Ruthven Murray (1868-1955) in 1913 (Mäyrä 2008, 6).

In recent decades, however, literary scholars, among other humanities researchers, have also turned their attention to games, with notable examples including Espen Aarseth, who wrote *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* in 1997, and Janet Murray, author of *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, released in the same year (Mäyrä 2008, 8). Dom Ford, a former student of English literature, builds on this longer tradition in his new book *Mytholudics: Games and Myth*, published by De Gruyter in 2025 as part of the series “Video Games and the Humanities”, by providing game studies scholars with a framework for analyzing games *as* and *through* myth.

Initially conceived as Ford’s PhD project and developed under the supervision of Hans-Joachim Løvind Backe, *Mytholudics: Games and Myth* begins by stressing the enduring nature of myth, which Ford understands as “a way, a form, a mode of creating, asserting, negotiating and expressing meaning” (2025, 2). Highly adaptable and persistent across time, myth is an essential part of culture and finds expression in games, among many other possible sites of mythic expression, as Ford argues (*ibidem*). Games, however, appear to differ from other media because, according to Ford, their unique affordances allow myth to inform and permeate a singular combination of phenomena, namely “play, worlds, simulations, and narratives” (*idem*, 4). While at times conflating myth with mythology, a problem the author addresses by clarifying that mythology refers “to a system as a whole” and myth to “a smaller unit within that” (*idem*, 6), Ford combines a hermeneutic approach based on Roland Barthes’s mythology with Frog’s mythic discourse analysis (*idem*, 307). In doing so, Ford proposes analyzing games both *as* and *through* myth. Whereas looking at games *as* myth, an approach Ford describes as “naïve”, allows for an understanding of the game itself as a kind of mythology, “an instantiation or realisation of a particular model for understanding the world”, seeing games *through* myth implies recognizing that games are influenced by myths that exist outside them (*idem*, 6). A “mytholudic” analysis, a term coined by Ford, allows for a fruitful combination of both approaches: “We must understand the gameworld on its own terms before we can trace its heritage, but we will always find we cannot fully understand the gameworld without also relating it to the broader culture in which it is situated” (*ibidem*).

Following its introductory section, and excluding the concluding remarks, *Mytholudics: Games and Myth* is divided into four chapters: the first two are theoretical in nature, whereas

the latter two adopt a more practical approach. As Ford himself recognizes, the chapter “What Is Myth?” is “a violently abridged, whirlwind tour of the many meanings of myth as a term” (*idem*, 7), but its main purpose is to build toward the conceptualization of mytholudics, defined in “Towards Mytholudics”, the second theoretical chapter. Here, the author explains that virtuality, nonlinearity, and performativity come together in a unique way in games, representing the parameters that should be taken into consideration when analyzing games *as* and *through* myth (*idem*, 63). Ford also adds that mytholudics “describes a mythological approach to understanding how games make meaning that focuses on these aspects of games” (*ibidem*), allowing for the identification of the elements of games that are meaningful and the ways in which they are meaningful. The remaining two chapters put theory into practice, giving the book a refreshing didactic quality while focusing on heroism and monstrosity by analyzing ten game examples. At no point does the analysis feel detached from the theoretical issues previously addressed, and these final chapters lend mytholudics a solidity that a purely theoretical discussion could never hope to achieve.

The book does present some minor problems, however. Despite the fact that games are clearly perceived as cultural artifacts, cultural studies are only mentioned in the context of some bibliographic references. The discussion surrounding ideology and how it differs from Ford’s understanding of myth also feels rushed and oversimplified, and could have benefitted hugely from engaging with authors such as Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Louis Althusser (1918-1990), to name just two examples. A similar oversimplification is also present when the author addresses literature in comparison with games, particularly in the introduction, where Ford states that “the words in a novel will always be in the same order” (*idem*, 4). While this is not entirely incorrect, it fails to account for the full scope of experimentalism associated with modernist and postmodernist works published during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. All of this is easily explained, however, by the fact that Ford’s main objective was to conceptualize mytholudics and provide a framework that other game scholars could apply to their own work. And that is precisely what he was able to achieve.

## WORKS CITED

Ford, Dom (2025). *Mytholudics: Games and Myth*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

Mäyrä, Frans (2008). *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. London: Sage.

## HOW TO CITE

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