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Editorial

DOA

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Abstract

Playing on the double-meaning of the abbreviation DOA as referring to both *diamond open access* and *dead-on-arrival*, the editorial presents the rationale, politics, and not least severe challenges connected to *Eludamos*'s radical open access practices. Given the recent growth of the journal, we need to balance our publishing policies against the threats of (self-) exploitation and exhaustion of our reviewers and team of editors. We argue that institutional embedding and strategic logistical and financial support is crucial for the success of any DOA publishing project and point to a promising recent initiative taken by the university library at UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

Keywords

Diamond open access, academic publishing, Aaron Swartz, *Eludamos*, Septentrio

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> *Information is power. But like with all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves.*
>
> Aaron Swartz, *Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto* (2009)

***Eludamos* is growing.** This year's open issue has twelve articles. In 2025, we have moved from one to two issues a year with a line-up of submissions and special issues suggesting that a year with three issues might not be far off. This growth happened despite retaining a rejection rate of roughly 70% of all incoming manuscripts. This development is the result of systematic efforts by the editorial board and Septentrio Academic Publishing at UiT to create permanent structures around the journal and increase its impact and accessibility. Today, all incoming submissions are checked via Crossref, and all published articles receive DOI numbers and are indexed in Scopus, ERIH PLUS, and DOAJ. We have research ethical procedures in place and have most recently adopted AI guidelines for authors and reviewers. For us, it is fantastic

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to see that these efforts are about to pay off in terms of increased attention and growing numbers of submissions.

While the growth of our journal is a positive development reflecting the interest and trust of an increasing number of scholars, it also creates challenges in terms of available resources. The time and energy needed for assessing the relevance and quality of incoming submissions, identifying and corresponding with reviewers, giving feedback to authors, doing copy- and layout editing, and so forth has increased massively over the past three years and has put significant strains on editorial board members and reviewers.

These challenges are severe because *Eludamos* is published under a diamond open access (DOA) license (CC BY 4.0)—we neither charge our authors nor our readers for publishing and accessing scholarly work through our journal. And since we do not charge anyone, we do not have a stable funding that allows us to pay for copy- and layout-editing or other crucial tasks. Instead, we are dependent on sporadic small-scale support from our universities. As a result, most of the increasing amount of work involved in running a growing DOA journal has to be shouldered by the editorial team working on a voluntary basis, without payment. In the long run, we fear that this 'business' model might not be sustainable. As a cynic might see it, the abbreviation DOA publishing might just as well mean dead-on-arrival publishing. Many believe the practice is simply not feasible in the long run (e.g. Poynder, 2024).

However, DOA publishing – the diamond version – is important for us. We see it as one way of practically contributing to what we 'preach' in our editorials, journal policies, and critical articles. By making publicly funded research that has been reviewed and assessed by colleagues for free accessible to all without charges is to us a small contribution to the gradual creation of a more just and sustainable (scholarly) world. It is also a consciously political move against the big business of for-profit academic publishing. After all, we agree with Pooley (2024, p. 1) who asserts that in DOA publishing (as in politics in general) it is important "to maintain unrealistic expectations". He writes, "whether or not another (scholarly publishing) world is possible, it is important to act *as if* it is" as this helps retain our ability to influence what he terms "the aperture of imaginative possibility" (emphasis in original). At *Eludamos* we attempt to contribute to just that. Our journal's DOA policies and membership in the Radical Open Access Collective (ROAC) attest to that.

To bring the DOA activities at *Eludamos* into political context and illustrate what we believe to be at stake, we will now briefly turn to a story about two programmers. The two yet-unnamed young men met at a Y Combinator tech startup hackathon in Silicon Valley in 2005 (see Jakobsen, 2024). In the years following this event, one of them became one of the richest and most powerful persons in the world while the other was arrested and charged for stealing copyrighted material. One key difference accounting for the dissimilar ways in which their lives developed are precisely

their diverging views on copyright legislation, privacy, surveillance, and DOA academic publishing.

One of the programmers was smart in a problem-solving manner. He developed a way of appropriating massive amounts of online data and process, commodify, and profit off them within the frames of a given system of digital surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019; Crawford, 2021) that he never questioned. The second of the two was a critical thinker who interrogated the conditions under which digital communication and scholarly publication operate and who devised strategies to challenge and ultimately subvert the given unjust system. The first became a billionaire and hero of financialized venture capitalism by stealing almost unprecedented amounts of data from virtually everyone on the planet, while the second was arrested and charged for downloading and illegally distributing copyrighted research articles while working as a PhD candidate at MIT. An unforgiving public prosecutor threatened him with 35 years in prison for this 'crime'.

The name of the first of this duo is Sam Altman, today CEO of OpenAI, the name of the second is Aaron Swartz, researcher and OA activist, who took his own life in 2013. The very different treatments these men experienced for their uses of online information says a lot about the imbalances, inequalities, and injustice of our present condition. Therefore, the parallel story of these two illustrates well why we at *Eludamos* believe that DOA academic publishing is politically and economically important. In the sense of Swartz's 'Guerilla Open Access Manifesto' (2009) cited at the beginning of this editorial, we want our research articles to be accessible and usable for everyone with an Internet connection and want everyone with a good idea and sound research to support it to be able to publish with us for free. Because we agree with Adema's (2024, p. 1) statement that "reimagining and, crucially, *reperforming* the way we publish and make research public … forms part of a wider attempt to create more ethical and equitable scholarly forms, institutions, and practices" (our emphasis).

In this endeavor, *Eludamos* has received invaluable support from Septentrio Academic Publishing and the University Library at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Not only do these institutions offer us technical and logistical expertise, but they most recently also have devised a strategy of channeling funds previously dedicated to pay for expensive journal subscriptions into DOA publishing. By pushing through a 25% discount from Elsevier and cutting the subscription with Wiley entirely, the university library released funds that are now allocated to facilitate DOA academic publishing across several levels and domains ranging from international organizations working for DOA initiatives to funds which DOA journals in dire need of financial assistance can apply for (Aspaas et al., 2025).

The example above shows that, to succeed on a larger scale, DOA academic publishing cannot solely rely on the time and energy of activists and enthusiasts but needs institutional backing and strategic political and financial support. The attempts of

our editorial board to 'maintain unrealistic expectations' and imagine and enact academic publishing futures otherwise can only be a first step in a wider restructuring of the academic publishing landscape away from profit-driven enterprises to DOA alternatives. We perceive our work as one small step on this long journey.

This issue

The issue you are currently holding in your virtual hands is massive. Twelve original articles draw from multiple disciplines and offer new conceptual insights, fresh empirical research, and critical analyses of specific games or genres. In addition, we publish four book reviews and one commentary. Here the complete list of contributions to volume 16, issue 2, 2025:

In "Metroidvania Ecologies: Exploration and the Environmental Imagination in *Hollow Knight* and *Rain World,*" Angelo Maria Andriano and Marco Caracciolo situate the *Metroidvania* games within the emerging body of research on ecogaming. The authors argue that the spatial interconnectedness of the *Metroid* games has a strong resonance with ecological theories of human-nonhuman enmeshment and nonhuman autonomy. Focusing on the two titles *Hollow Knight* and *Rain World*, Andriano and Caracciolo show how these games challenge the player's environmental imagination and ideas of human mastery over the nonhuman world.

Kathrin Trattner takes a player-centric perspective on the influential *Civilization* series in '"Was Barbarossa not German?!": Nation, history, and identity in *Civilization* players' online discussions'. Through a qualitative content analysis of discussions in the largest German-speaking *Civilization* forum, she investigates how players negotiate the games' ideological biases based on their own national identities.

In 'Reified Gameplay: Revisiting Playbour through Critical Theory', Tuomas Manninen revisits the concept of *playbour*; the phenomenon that activities originally understood as play sometimes resemble and function as labour. Applying a Critical Theory perspective, Manninen offers an analysis of the concept and its theoretical implications. Using *EVE Online* and *Cryptokitties* as examples, he offers the novel concept of *reified gameplay* to understand the alienating tendencies of playbour, where reified gameplay is "a form of gameplay action shaped by processes of reification and rationalisation within and as part of the culture industry."

Nele van de Mosselaer introduces us to the concept of *fake games* in 'Fake Games: On Dark and Deceptive Representations of Non-Actual Games'. Based on Gualeni and Fassone's concept of fictional games, she defines fake games as "non-actual games that are presented with the intention to trigger false beliefs in the existence of the game or its presented mechanics and story". Van de Mosselaer distinguishes between *darkly* and *deceptively* designed fake game representations, arguing that while darkly designed fake games have the purpose to deceive players into making

certain decisions, such as buying a game on false premises, deceptively designed fake games deceive players for the purpose of creating aesthetically valuable experiences.

In "Antagonistic Game Design: The Author as a Player', Stefano Gualeni investigates "antagonistic game design", which is the creation of games intended to frustrate and provoke players. He argues that player engagement with such titles emerges from resisting an antagonistic implied author behind the work, and that such games establish an asynchronous and adversarial relationship between players and game that fosters alternative pathways for meaning making.

In '*Lies of P* and a Real Boy in Fake *Bloodborne*: Nostalgia and Critique in Soulsborne Fandom', Indira Neill Hoch analyses the press coverage and fan comments on Youtube videos addressing the videogame Lies of P as a nostalgic trigger connecting to Soulsborne fandom and Collodi's 1883 children's tale of Pinocchio. In the article, Hoch shows how reflective nostalgia can serve as a point of departure for better understanding game-adjacent spaces where affect and critique blend.

In '*Unpacking* an Obfuscated Female Protagonist: The Use of Mise-en-Scène in Minimalist Videogame Narrative through Social Semiotics', Mienke Fouché argues that the game *Unpacking* offers a novel approach to ludonarratology by omitting a visible protagonist and instead focusing on the spaces and objects that players interact with. According to the author, this minimalist narrative technique can foster engaging storytelling experiences. The study has broader implications both for game design and narrative theory because it offers a novel approach to minimalist design in interactive storytelling, and because it offers a framework for analyzing how environmental storytelling may convey character identity.

Contributing to the scholarly discourse around games and ecology, Lawrence May discusses *emergent ecological dynamics* in his contribution 'Emergent Ecological Dynamics in Videogames: What Player Paratexts Reveal'. The concept explains how new ecocritical meaning can emerge from user-created paratexts reflecting the ephemeral experience of videogame play. As player experiences of ecologies and environments that emerge in ways unintended by game designers so far are undertheorized, the article offers new methods and insights on this matter.

Adding to the emerging body of research on cozy games, Rowan Daneels and Kato Maes present a rare player study of the genre in 'Curled Up with a Good Game: A Survey Study on Personality Traits and Game Motives of Cozy Game Players'. Their survey study of 277 players examines game motives and personality traits, offering novel insights into how players use cozy games for moral self-reflection, agency, escapism, experiencing eudaimonic emotions, and experiencing engaging narratives.

In 'Of Reviews and Women: A Study of Women Discourses on Gender in Videogame Magazines', Samuel Heine and Marie-Christine Beauvais offer insight into the discourse of women writers and how they write about female protagonists in the US

gaming press in the period 1981–2021. The authors observe a complex situation of partly contradicting intentions where women's writing sometimes is influenced by masculine hegemonic discourses, while at other times signaling resistance and critique towards this hegemony.

In 'The Arena of Teamwork: The Impact of Stellate Polygonal Seating on Multiplayer Game Performance', Geunyoung Kim examines how the spatial arrangement and seating configuration of players affect performance, communication, and teamwork in multiplayer sessions. Through two empirical studies, the paper demonstrates the complex relationship between spatial layout and team effectiveness in gaming and indicates that optimal multiplayer setups must balance functionality with social and spatial dynamics.

Yixiang Que, Teresa de la Hera and Jeroen Jansz provide an overview of the status quo of the research on cultural heritage representation in videogames in 'From Tradition to Interaction: A Systematic Literature Review of Cultural Heritage Representation in Entertainment Videogames'. Their review of 80 publications shows that research so far covers representation of tangible cultural heritage, while intangible cultural heritage has received significantly less attention. Designers, they show, tend to select cultural heritage elements already familiar to their audiences.

In addition to the original articles, the issue includes four book reviews and one commentary.

Megan Condis looks at Adrienne Massanari's *Gaming Democracy: How Silicon Valley Leveled Up the Far Right* (MIT Press, 2024) that presents analyses of three case studies of far-right game cultures – #Gamergate, the cyberlibertarian philosophy underpinning Silicon Valley, and the subreddit r/TheDonald. The book offers crucial insights into the current media ecosystem and its political implications.

Jaroslav Švelch offers his review of the collected volume *Monstrosity in Games and Play: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Monstrous in Contemporary Cultures*, edited by Sarah Stang, Mikko Meriläinen, Joleen Blom, and Lobna Hassan (Amsterdam University Press 2025). He finds that while the book's weakness that it diverges in multiple directions when investigating issues ranging from in-game monsters to monstrosity as a metaphor, it also enriches the study of monsters and monstrosity in game studies by showcasing this diversity.

The Rise of the Roguelite: *Inside a Gaming Phenomenon,* edited by James Cartlidge (CRC Press, 2025) has been reviewed by David Matencio Durán. The anthology offers a variety of perspective on the roguelite genre and is recommended for researchers and anyone else with an interest in the genre.

As the last book review in this issue, Evan Moore reviews Robert Houghton's *The Middle Ages in Computer Games: Ludic Approaches to the Medieval and Medievalism,* published by D. S. Brewer in 2024, a book that follows up on the author's edited

volume of 2023. The book offers various approaches to the exploration and analysis of medievalist video games and is recommended for both new and experienced scholars with an interest in medievalist videogames.

Finally, this issue's commentary, 'The State of Native Representation in Videogames' penned by Thomas James Reed interrogates how Native and Indigenous peoples are represented in videogames. Building on own experiences, Reed offers a historical overview and scathing critique before ending with a series of positive case studies that can inspire future game design.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue!

Final remarks

As usual, we end our editorial with a big thank you to all our readers, authors, and reviewers who keep this journal alive and kicking (upwards). Any thinkable DOA publishing initiative however well-funded, thought through, and strategically supported would indeed be dead-on-arrival without you!

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