From *Dungeons & Dragons* to *Dragon Quest:* Cultural dialogue and material shifts

Andrea MARIUCCI **|** Cornell University, USA

ABSTRACT

Arguably one of the most popular genres in today's video game market is the Japanese role-playing game (JRPG). The distinguishing traits of the genre are often a matter of debate. The final decision on whether something is a JRPG usually relies more on general feelings than on rigid criteria (Mallindine 2016). However, one shared trait among the exponents of the genre is that they find its roots in Western tabletop role-playing games, such as Dungeons&Dragons *(1974). As a matter of fact,* Dungeons&Dragons *served as an inspiration for many other role-playing games (RPGs). One such example is* Wizardry *(1981), which, together with Ultima (1981), was among the most successful computer role-playing games of its time (Barton & Stacks 2008). The two games served as the beginning for long-spanning series, which enjoyed wide success in Japan (Adams 1985), where the RPG genre as a whole was soon integrated, through various platforms, into the local media ecology (Steinberg 2015). Wizardry in particular was also among the games which influenced Horii Yūji (Horii 2018a. 2018b) to create* Dragon Quest *(1986), one of the earliest examples of JRPG. This article seeks to draw a connection between* Dungeons&Dragons *and the early JRPGs. First, I compare* Dungeons&Dragons*, a tabletop RPG, to its most well-known digital counterparts of the time, Wizardry and Ultima. By doing this, I expose the differences between 'pen and paper' and 'screen and software.' Then, I observe the differences between* Wizardry, Ultima, *and* Dragon Quest *in terms of both aesthetics and gameplay, in order to understand how Japanese developers and distributors negotiated the concept of RPG for the Japanese market. In both comparisons I consider how characters, avatar, gameplay, and narrative are mediated by the platform and the cultural milieu hosting them.*

Introduction: Culture, play, and platforms

In the introductory issue of the *Japanese journal for analog role-playing game studies*, table talk game designer Kondō Koshi states that role-playing games in Japan were imported, adopted, and adapted (2019, 4). In other words, role-playing games have entered a new environment, and they have changed in response to it. This is reminiscent of a paradigm describing information flow between symbolic systems, that of the *semiosphere*, proposed by Jurij M. Lotman (1992 [1984]), which aims at describing the production of information within a culture, conceptualised as an open

set of texts. In short, it posits that communication and new information can be produced solely within a system of existing references. As new, foreign texts access it, they are simply rendered coherent with the existing information and incorporated within the whole.

Such an overarching system – a culture – could be intuitively compared to what Eiji Ōtsuka (2010 [1989]) envisioned as a "grand narrative," a connective tissue, bringing together all elements within a specific canon of texts, ready for any user to consume. The grand narrative links and creates seemingly unrelated stories, which form a cohesive whole by virtue of partaking in the same open-ended system. Azuma Hiroki (2009) challenges this view by proposing that a database of traits and characteristics, rather than an all-encompassing narrative, is the real object of consumption. A bundle of semi-autonomous features, that is to say, a character, is therefore taken as the new centre of a "grand-nonnarrative." The scholar later introduces a different category, the *sōzōryoku no kankyō* ("imagination environment") as an additional way in which we understand the media to which we are exposed (2007). These frameworks share the assumption that a set of existing interpretive regimes (i.e. a narrative, a database, or a culture) serve as conditions for meaning, in the form of content, to emerge. Additionally, in these models, meaning is often envisioned as being fluid, and flowing freely across systems (e.g. the case of a text moving across cultural spheres, or that of different iterations of a narrative across media).

Keeping in mind the way in which content can move from one of these ideal spaces to the other, one possible way to think about Kondō's statement is connecting it to the opposition between hardware and software. That is to say, what Steinberg describes when he mentions Kadokawa magazines as platforms (hardware) generating content (software) (2015b). Role-playing itself may therefore be seen as software, running through different machines, as well as different sociocultural milieux. Its adaptation may just be the result of the affordances of a wide range of platforms, defined in a broader sense, which may include both material and social infrastructures[1]. In this

---

[1] Steinberg (2019) provides a thorough and insightful account of different kinds of platforms. His typology individuates three types of platforms: 1) foundations for layered structures, 2) infrastructure supporting content, or 3) spaces of mediation and transaction. Taking all of these into account, I wish to avoid a purely electronic or digital conceptualisation of platforms – an issue which Steinberg addresses when discussing transactional platforms (ibid., chap. 3)

context, it is relevant that the cultural dimension has been rendered not just pertinent, but preeminent in the case of Japan. In fact, the label of "Japanese role-playing game" (JRPG) has originated among non-Japanese audiences (Pelletier-Gagnon 2018), and it usually designates a distinct genre. This has been an extremely productive space for game scholars, which has seen the publication of major works, especially in recent years (Consalvo 2016; Hutchinson 2019; Hutchinson and Pelletier-Gagnon 2022). Among the different interpretations of the genre that have emerged, we find arguments for JRPG as a category of nostalgia (Mallindine 2016), or for its aesthetic performativity (Schules 2015). Some of these fall within the boundaries of what Pelletier-Gagnon (2022, 99) refers to as "culturalist" and "formalist" approaches, to which he presents the alternative reading of the JRPG as a marginalising label. The definition of a genre by virtue of its geographical place of origin would also represent a point of connection with recent literature on the anime industrial complex. For instance, Suan's *Anime's Identity* (2021) presents a detailed account of the network of transnational relations behind what he calls *anime-esque* performance. This is peculiar, because this kind of performance allows the form's ties to Japan to remain extremely salient, despite its highly geographically scattered production history.

To further develop the parallel with platforms, Lamarre stresses the tenuousness of the boundary between "soft" and "hard" (2019, 217). He maintains that a platform should not be seen only as a content-host, but also as a potential subject-like interactor with other platforms (ibid, 222). In addition to speaking to the situatedness of certain material artefacts, this is especially relevant, since it opens the possibility to analyse game software as potentially interacting not just with the machines on which it is run, or with individual users, but also with other alleged content-hosts, such as magazines, or with social groupings, such as player communities.[2]

On these premises, this essay aims at tracing a genealogical trajectory of role-playing,[3] conceived partially as content, and partially as platform. I start by addressing the birth of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Tactical Studies Rules 1974) (hereafter D&D), the first formalised version of the genre. Then, via the microcomputer game *Wizardry* (Sir-

---

[2] Lamarre (2017, 2019) refers to this type of interaction as "platformativity".

[3] The concept of role-playing taken as a unit of analysis here is socio-historically situated, so it should not be taken as neutral. My usage here is largely for convenience to set a starting point.

Tech 1981), I observe how the concept of role-playing was translated for the Nintendo Famicom, with *Dragon Quest* (Enix 1986). At each step of the analysis, I consider how each hardware constrained the role-playing software, by looking at the network of adjacent platforms and discourses – *apparatus*, in Lamarre's terms (2019, 37-38). Throughout the analysis my focus is stronger on the ways in which commercial platforms, community engagement, and other factors influence and shape the notion of role-playing. However, this should not prevent us from observing the responses of players to specific incarnations of the genre – as it is evident as some points of the analysis. In thinking about hardware affordances or mutual influences, I do not refer exclusively to gameplay elements, either, as I argue that certain types of platforms often allow for the creation of virtual spaces (Huber 2012), as well as communities (Law 2005; Tobin 2013).

One of the aims of this study, in light of the attention that the term has received, is to interrogate the notion of "Japanese role-playing game." In particular, through my analysis, I wish to reconstruct one branch of its genealogy, in order to try to understand the alleged emergence of its cultural difference, hopefully mitigating it. By centring attention on the interplay between various affordances, it may be possible to conceive of the divergence of genres as more than a strictly cultural phenomenon. Rather, conceptualising the shift in terms of a software flowing through different platforms may instead shed light on the indeterminacy engendered by networks of practices and infrastructures. In other words, I will be considering the displacement of a genre to different contexts. By focusing on the individual interactions, rather than ascribing general features to any given sociohistorical context, I hope that my intervention will provide at least a glimpse of the complexity of each one of them, as well as of their contingency and unpredictability. In doing this, I wish to place the influence of "culture" in a different, less all-encompassing perspective while acknowledging the necessary variations of an object circulating through different times and places.

1. The emergence of *Dungeons & Dragons*

D&D is often considered to be the inspiration for modern role-playing games. White et al. (2018) takes it as a prototypical example of a tabletop role-playing game, while its influence on the wider gaming landscape allowed Chris Crawford (1982) to define a category of games as "D&D games" in his early work on computer game design.

Stenros and Montola (2010, 308) claim that even the many Nordic live action role-playing (LARP) traditions originated in the 1980s as a consequence of the success of the game in concert with other media products. While it is true that the creation of D&D was a watershed, it did not emerge out of nothing. Peterson (2012, 2018) presents an in-depth account of its precursors. He argues that the experiences from the wargaming community and live-action experiments, together with the sheer success of the Tolkien mythos, coalesced into the development and rise in popularity of D&D. Barton and Stacks (2008) also list the presence of baseball player cards among the possible influences. However, for the purposes of this essay, only wargames and fantasy literature will be considered.

1.1. J.R.R. Tolkien and Fantasy dungeons

Tolkien achieved widespread success in the 1960s, following both an authorised edition of his works by Ballantine's Books, and a bootlegged paperback edition published by Ace Books. According to Foster (2012, 15), this success profoundly influenced the generation attending high school and college in those years, and since then, the books never experienced any fall in popularity. This is perfectly recognisable both in the text itself and in the paratexts[4] surrounding D&D.

The first edition of the game was dotted with more or less explicit references. For instance, players could meet *nazguls*, *ents*, and *balrogs* during their journey. Additionally, the description of certain spells pointed to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in order to support the players' imagination of the powers in question (Tactical Studies Rules 1974, 23). However, such explicit references were erased starting from the sixth edition of the rulebook in 1977, as a consequence of a legal threat from the Tolkien Estate (Burdge 2012, 229). Moreover, Rob Kuntz, a contributor to the D&D project, denied any tie between the game and the literary works in a 1978 article in *The Dragon*.[5]

---

[4] The official magazine and Gygax's The Strategic Review newsletter, for example.

[5] *The Dragon*, later renamed *Dragon*, was printed by Tactical Studies Rules, the owner and distributor of D&D. It was mostly dedicated to fantasy and science fiction, and it was established as a related, albeit largely separate project from the game, even though it served as the main platform for fans and creators to express themselves. Applecline (2014) offers a thorough description and a first-hand report of the foundation and the functions of the magazines, which will be partially also covered in this article.

In a 1985 column, Gary Gygax explicitly stated that early references were a strategic move on his part, aimed at boosting sales. *The Dragon*, as the game's official magazine, provides compelling evidence to the effectiveness of the strategy. Both fans and collaborators on the project could publish there. Many contributions would involve, for instance, proposals for alternative rulesets (e.g. new classes, races, or environments), as well as serialised stories, where the players recounted real or made-up play sessions. Within all of this material, where official announcements meshed with user engagement, it is possible to find a significant number of contributions discussing the works of Tolkien. For instance, fans discussed how to adapt the ruleset to fit a Tolkien-inspired campaign, or ways in which the game-world differed from the literary work. This trend lasted well after the 1977 revised edition. In other words, although the connection had been erased on paper, it was in all likelihood still alive in the players' minds.

1.2. From wargaming to role-playing

The other current that contributed to the birth of D&D was wargaming, an activity which has a long and transcultural history. Kamm (2020, 34) traces a line spanning from recent history back to 18th century Prussia, where wargames emerged as an alternative to chess. From there, it is possible to stretch the narrative back to 7th century India and the game *chaturaṅga*, which is the shared ancestor of a number of board games such as chess, *shōgi*, and the like found throughout Europe and Asia. Wargames usually revolve around the conflict between two or more players pitting their armies against each other; in this case the activity is largely competitive, as opposed to role-playing, which is a rather more collaborative form of play. The sessions are supervised by a referee, who settles disputes and interprets statistics, since the outcomes of actions are decided by rolling dice.

The clearest link between the genres is found in the early history of the game. As a matter of fact, the first edition of D&D was hardly autonomous, and it was closer to an appendix to Gygax's previous game, *Chainmail* (Guidon Games 1971). The latter was a more traditional medieval wargame, with special rules for jousting allowing for the player to control a single unit, rather than a battalion, and it derived from an experimental campaign in the late 1960s (Gygax 1977, 7).

Although they differ significantly in structure, it is possible to recognise similarities

and traces connecting wargaming to role-playing, at least in its tabletop form[6]. One glaring example is found in the constituents for both practices. Games require a certain player configuration, and create mutual relations between participants. In both wargames and role-playing games an external figure acts as a mediator between different interests: in the former, the referee is a neutral middleman, whereas in the latter, the game master actively provides a challenge to the players. In other words, the prototypical configuration of people sitting at a table and playing with dice, miniatures, and a map remains largely the same, while their relative positions and values shift. In other words, the difference lies in the practice's semantics and syntax, not in its morphology. [7] The figurines serve as proof of the connection, too. They are a superfluous element in D&D, only serving as stand-ins for easier visualisation of the diegesis. However, miniatures performed a function in the passage from wargaming to role-playing, as Gygax explains in *The Dragon* (1977, 7), where he mentions that the idea of shifting to personal adventures, instead of large-scale battles, came in part due to the heroic appearances of the figurines. The individualistic nature of the adventures would be conveyed not just by the possibility to control a single character, but also by the chance to customise the character by choosing features such as class, race, alignment, and name.

The degree of overlapping between wargaming and early role-playing is remarkable. Both genres generated communities of players, sharing an interest in the text, and enriching it through a constellation of platforms such as conventions, magazines, and newsletters. It is often possible to find cross-contamination between supposedly specialised or exclusive platforms, such as in the case of wargaming sections appearing in fantasy role-playing magazines. For instance, advertisements for medieval wargaming miniatures were present in every issue of *The Dragon*, whereas columns discussing military strategy in the ancient world were less frequent, albeit still present. Thus, it appears that the activities of each community were crucial to the connection of the two practices.

---

[6] Role-playing is extremely varied in both materials and modes if play, each one further divided into different traditions. For instance, see Kamm (2020) for the Japanese context, while Stenros and Montola (2010) cover Nordic LARPs.

[7] For a general account of practices as meaning making activities, see Fontanille (2006, 2010). The semantics of playfulness, on the other hand, have been tackled extensively by Thibault (2020)

Lastly, it is necessary to interrogate D&D's formalisation. The long-format rulebook is common for wargames, and it has interesting features, which, to use a digital metaphor, render it closer to a developer's kit with an in-built asset package, than to a game.[8] In other words, it is an extremely open-ended platform. The activity of play is often defined as the space of possibility within the game, which is a system of rules and restrictions.[9] A rulebook does not offer a structured experience, but a set of tables, themes, and an invitation to combine, or even alter them, creating multiple layers of authorship (Hammer 2007).

The statistical values in a volume are balanced for the enjoyment of an audience, and the global vision for a potential story-world is present. However, it would not be possible to pick up a manual and play in the same way in which one could do with, for example, a computer game. Thus, players are required to become designers to have a return on their investment in the purchase of the volume.[10] A dungeon master may spend days, weeks, or more, thinking about a scenario they want to present to their players. This explains the high level of engagement often found in the magazines: a user may design not just a scenario, but also new spells, races, or classes, which may or may not be shared with the community later on. User production was overtly incentivised since the beginning by the creators of D&D, who opened the first edition of the manual by stating that old rules can be altered, and new ones added, in order to keep the experience fresh.[11]

In sum, D&D as a formalised version of role-playing is platform-like in many ways. First, it offers all the possibilities of a game developer's kit, which renders it close to a prototypical programmable platform. By virtue of this, it produces scenarios, as well as engagement, and it can also host new building blocks for content. Second, it interacts

---

[8] I am taking a game studies perspective. The topic of role-playing is extremely vast, and many heuristic tools can be applied. This analysis ignores many aspects of the activity for the sake of coherence. For more about possible approaches to studying role-playing, see Harviainen (2008).

[9] See Salen and Zimmerman (2004, 2006), Bonenfant (2010), Thibault (2020). Even Roger Caillois (1958) relies on the presence of rules for the paidia/ludus spectrum of his typology.

[10] Albeit on a different scale, it may be possible to draw a parallel with Ōtsuka's (2016) repurposing of his theory of narrative consumption as a theory of narrative labor, as players effectively generate the content they consume.

[11] If not for the intention behind its creation, the functioning of *The Dragon* in the creative process of the D&D ecology bears an eerie resemblance to Steinberg's (2015b, 12-13) account of the role of magazines as platforms in the Tsuguhiko media-mix in the 1980s, such as *Conputikku*.

with other platforms, such as magazines. In doing so, it creates fertile ground for the development of a community of practice of sorts, as clearly demonstrated by the contents of *The Dragon*. It also organises space and time, both diegetically and extradiegetically. In other words, the game master produces a virtual time and space which is shared among players inhabiting a scenario, whereas the game's codes enforce a specific configuration of users and objects around the table, with varyingly precise rules for turn-taking.

2. Analogue and digital: *Wizardry*

Around the time when D&D was first published, videogames became part of the public consciousness. Home consoles and arcade cabinets have been commercially available since the early 1970s in the United States, while the first domestic microcomputers appeared only later in the same decade. The former two machines represented affordable and comparatively powerful options, whereas the latter had a much higher threshold for usage, in addition to having less processing power allotted exclusively for playing. Even at the end of the 1980s, when one fifth of households in the United States owned a microcomputer (Dutton et al. 1987), gaming on that platform was considered an activity for hobbyists and programmers. Ultimately, even though microcomputers were recognised as game machines, among other things, they were not perceived as the optimal or more accessible way of gaming for many (Kline et al. 2003, 93).

2.1. Connections to tabletop play

The relatively small, technically literate community of computer players seems to have shared much with both the wargamers and role-players. A significant portion of the literature on the topic (Barton and Stacks 2008; Kline et al. 2003; White et al. 2018) has focused on the clear influences of D&D on computer game design. For instance, one of the most influential role-playing games of the time, *Wizardry*, actively remediated elements of a prototypical tabletop play session.

The game consists in a fairly straightforward fantasy quest: the player must defeat the evil wizard Werdna, by assembling a party and reaching the depths of a dungeon, "the maze." In proposing this, *Wizardry* draws from different traditions of programming in order to create a relatively similar experience to that of D&D. For

example, it likely takes inspiration from text-based adventures for its main hub, simulating a castle with a tavern, a temple, and other infrastructures. The environment is only shaped by descriptions, rather than by a graphical interface. The latter comes into play when the player enters the dungeon. The view shifts from a purely verbal interface to a Cartesian first-person view, whereas the commands (e.g. attack, parry, spell) need to be typed on the keyboard.

Elements from its tabletop counterpart can be found in the process of character creation. Races and classes mirror those found in D&D, and the distribution of attributes follows a similar logic, too. These observations can be extended to games seemingly elaborating on the original formula by adding science fiction elements, such as *Ultima* (California Pacific Computer Co. 1981). Lastly, the social component of tabletop role-playing gets replaced in *Wizardry* with the addition of the possibility to control individually each character of an entire group, rather than a unique avatar.

In addition to formal similarities, however, the connection also lies in the activities of the community. Many emblematic examples of the links can be found in the specialised magazine *Computer Gaming World*. In the first article of the opening issue, game designer Chris Crawford writes about the future of computer wargaming. Moreover, in a 1986 interview, the creator of the *Ultima* series Richard Garriott explains that his interest in programming games owes in part to D&D and in part to a computer class taken in high school. Additional evidence of the connection with the tabletop gaming community can be found in the magazine's surveys. Since the earliest publications, *Computer Gaming World* has had a section called "inside the industry," where industry surveys and readers surveys would be published—a mutual exchange of information between corporations and players, as it were. One of the first reader surveys included questions about the readers' gaming habits, such as whether they had quit tabletop games (including both role-playing and wargaming) since their shift to computer gaming (1984, 6). Although the results may not be especially interesting or reliable, due to the lack of comprehensive data (e.g., there are no indications of how many readers took part in the survey), the fact that such questions appeared on page still serves as a testament to their relevance.

2.2. Digital games and space

In order to understand the discontinuity between tabletop and desktop, it is useful

to refer to an early review of *Wizardry*, which appeared in the magazine *Softalk*. According to the reviewer, the game is "the ultimate computer Dungeons and Dragons, extremely faithful to the original. Greenberg and Woodhead [the creators] merely act the role of the Dungeon Masters" (1981, 70).

Such a characterisation is extremely accurate in some respects, and it reveals one of the crucial differences between tabletop and computer role-playing. The dungeon master is no longer present at the table, as opposed to the situation in D&D. Kondō (2019) describes tabletop role-playing as being extremely malleable, the result of a continuous dialogue between the player and the game master, as well as within players. In fact, tabletop role-playing heavily depends on the participants' adherence to rules, power structures, and other structural elements of the game (Montola 2008), all of which are fundamentally negotiable.[12] On the contrary, computer role-playing games enforce a rigid division between user and text. In order to flout the rules in a computer game, it is necessary to either possess high digital literacy, or have access to external help.[13] Thus, the first relevant shift from analogue to digital rests in the user's relation with text and designer. As the designer abandons the table, all which is left is the text, now set in stone – if not from an interpretive point of view, then from a material one.

Earlier in the same piece, the reviewer states that "*Wizardry* is not a game. It's a place" (1981, 69). Based on the previous elaboration on the state of the scenario, the reviewer's opinion acquires a deeper meaning. Namely, the same scenario is now shared among all the players. As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, rulebooks only provide a worldview and a set of statistics. Pre-made adventures exist, but they do not constitute the core tabletop role-playing game experience. Open-ended design is part of the pen-and-paper platform's main affordances. As a consequence, despite originating from the same core text, every game session displays a certain measure of variation. Creatures, spells, and settings are shared among the D&D community. However, fan additions and individual variations to the rules are common, either

---

[12] An example of the complexity of interpretative role-playing can be found in Loponen and Montola (2004), where the scholar illustrates the malleability of a play session's diegesis by explaining it through Peircean semiosis.

[13] In the case of *Wizardry*, a particularly famous case is that of *WizPlus*, a third-party software which allowed the players to alter statistics and modify the game in a number of ways. This sort of subversion was highly discouraged, as it would alter the intended balance of the game (Barton and Stacks 2008, 96-97).

because of a creative dungeon master, or simply because any person may interpret the rules in a slightly different manner. In addition to that, every element of the game is interpretable in a number of ways, depending on the participants and their real-life connections. As noted by Pettersson:[14]

> Most of the players in this game were people I know. […] I walk into a room and I see my friends Mike, Mika and Jaakko playing their characters. Suddenly Mike approaches me and starts shouting at me, accusing me of corrupting his sister. At that point, he switches from being my friend into being his character, because at that point I have to deal with him in character. (2006, 103)

In the passage from analogue to digital, the scenario, once the object of negotiation between dungeon master and players, crystallises into a single vision by the authors of the game, who are now separated from the text and therefore no longer responding to the users. At the same time, that vision, in the form of software, reaches the machines of every person who owns it.

Previously, only small groups of players shared points of references to their campaign, while now all players would visit the same virtual space. As the reviewer puts it: "It's a village you've not been in before […] Why not stop in the tavern for a frothy ale? Gilgamesh welcomes new guests, and you're apt to find some worthy companions" (1981, 69).

Huber's (2012) analysis of *Final Fantasy* spatiality through Harvey and Lefebvre is especially useful when considering this shift. He reframes the player's aesthetic experience of a videogame through Harvey's (2006) matrix, which expands Lefebvre's (1974) tripartite division of space, by considering not just how space is produced, represented, and experienced, but also accounting for its absolute, relative, and relational dimensions. In sum, through Harvey, Huber considers the player's lived experience of the virtual environment, emphasising the realness of the sensations, rather than the fictitiousness of the space.

With the shift to digital, the game's material space becomes fixed, as opposed to tabletop play, where space and actions are created discursively and are continuously

---

[14] Although Pettersson is describing his experience in LARP, the same scenario may take place in many different kinds of interpretative role-playing.

negotiated (Montola 2008). The diegetic spatiality of the computer game, as well as its narrative, are shared and unchanging amongst a community of players; thus, they develop the potential to become stable referents. The magnitude of this change can be recognised, among other things, in the – relatively sparse – appearance of complaints in the "letters to editor" section of *Computer World Magazine*, as well as in the reasonably common concern in articles and reviews that too many clues will spoil the fun.

In sum, the tabletop hardware affords broader creative freedom than the microcomputer. This is due to the fact that in the latter's case, designing is no longer part of the experience, due to the high literacy required in order to engage with the game's code. The relations between the two manifestations of the role-playing software are that of a code (ruleset and assets) and a text (a scenario). This limitation, however, produces a stable virtual environment which is shared among the community. Therefore, instead of being built upon a broadly common language—that of the ruleset—the players share a text, which provides ample space for individual interpretation, but which is in turn bounded by the fixedness of the properties of its object (Eco 1990, 1998). Simply put, every *Wizardry* player could interact with any other player and discuss the same experience,[15] as if they were part of the same D&D campaign.

3. Crossing national borders: *Dragon Quest*

3.1. A different cultural sphere

The transition from analogue to digital involved two partially overlapping communities – wargamers and programmers – in the context of a blossoming videogame industry inside of a single country. The boundaries of these communities, dictated by the apparatuses of their platforms of reference, however, were not equal to the national ones; each community shaped its borders through practices, texts, and machines. This is especially evident when one looks at the early Japanese videogame market. In fact, as noted by Kobayashi and Koyama (2019), it is possible to see relatively similar patterns of hobbyists partaking in communal activities centred

---

[15] Allowing for the variation tied to the aleatory textuality of a game.

around the personal computer, with shared networks of magazines, manuals, and events. Where the national borders come into play is in the constitution of these networks. More specifically, existing institutions and economic incentives heavily influence an industry's development, which has ties to the social connections and the use of platforms. In Japan's case, this meant a well-established corporate complex and existing pools of experts upon which companies could draw (Aoyama and Izushi 2003, 2006; Picard 2013), and who were quite often part of other subcultural groups, tied to a number of cultural industries. Finally, access to non-Japanese software often passed through porting between machines, re-elaboration by Japanese developers, or import of machines on which it could be run.

Dragon Quest is an emblematic case. The minds behind its creation, Horii Yūji and Nakamura Kōichi were hobbyist programmers who were hired into the corporate world through a game-development competition sponsored by Enix (Ishinomori and Takizawa 1990). Horii, in particular, is a good example of the phenomenon to which Aoyama and Izushi (2006) refer, when they mention cross-pollination between different creative industries. In fact, Horii was an employee at Shūeisha, another pop cultural corporate giant, before joining Enix, in addition to being an active member of manga circles and clubs at Waseda University in his academic years (Waseda University 2016). His turn to the computer industry happened at a later date, when he taught himself how to code. Moreover, as Altice (2015) points out, his main strength had always been writing and characterisation. Borrowing Janet Murray's (1997, 15) terms, he could be described as a bard turned into a hacker, rather than the opposite.

Additionally, the collaborative effort of game developers and other professionals, such as Toriyama Akira and Sugiyama Kōichi, harmonises with that period's general blurring of the lines between media. That is to say, what both Steinberg (2015b) and Lamarre (2019) have recognised as an exponential growth in the focus on the software/hardware dichotomy. Both Toriyama and Sugiyama were established artists in their own right. The former was especially well-known for his *Dr.Slump!* series, published by Horii's former employer, Shueisha, whereas the latter was a successful composer for television and other media. Building on Campana's (2015) illustration of transmediality and of the porousness of platforms, the inclusion of these authors into the production of the game was likely successful as it managed to attach the title to innumerable other facets of everyday life. As a platform, it created a common space

where Toriyama and Sugiyama could exist together. In Peircean terms, the network of objects—the authors and their aesthetics or works— became mutual interpretants. Something as immaterial (as "soft") as Toriyama's drawing style would immediately take the viewer's attention to the recently released game, or to the composer's works, or any other directional relation between the three.

Other sociocultural elements are to be found in some of the formal aspects of the game, some of which have already been noted by Altice (2015, chap. 6). One example of this is connected to the technical limitations of the console. Since saving was not possible, it was necessary to insert a password to unlock access to items, levels, and other in-game advantages which could be accessed after reaching certain milestones. Some of these passwords were rendered easier to remember by using famous *haiku* instead of inventing 14-line strings of characters from scratch.

3.2. A multi-user software

The common narrative surrounding the birth of the game reinforces the idea that not just a worldview or a story, but the very concept of role-playing is adaptable to different platforms. In fact, the official origin story of *Dragon Quest* sees Horii and Nakamura discovering *Wizardry* at the 1983 AppleFest in San Francisco,[16] only to later set out to bring the genre to the Nintendo Famicom.

That said, the story is likely more complex. Japanese hobbyist programmers had already developed a great number of role-playing titles by the time the game was released, in 1986 (Schules et al. 2018). However, all these titles were released on personal computer, which greatly reduced their potential audience; as stated by *Dragon Quest* developer, Horii Yūji, "The threshold [for playing these games] was too high" (Nintendo 2009). In addition, while different technical standards had rendered Japan's computer game market comparatively detached from Euro-American ones, it would be wrong to consider Japan as an impenetrable bubble. In fact, hobbyists imported games and systems from overseas (Schules et al. 2018) while other influences on the genre, namely fantasy tabletop games (Kamm 2020) and Western

---

[16] Some scholars (e.g. Huber 2012) take *Ultima III* as the first release of an American computer role-playing game in Japan. However, the official dramatisation produced by Enix (1991), as well as Horii himself (Nintendo 2009) take the American convention as the origin point.

high fantasy novels (Arduini 2012), were also present in the country, although they were usually consumed by smaller audiences.

Following the line of software moving across platforms, role-playing was transferred onto a more powerful machine than the Apple II, as the dedicated Picture Processing Unit (PPU) allowed for a considerable degree of freedom with graphics, as well as for a distinction between a sprite layer and a background layer (Altice 2015). More importantly, however, the genre became part of a structurally and aesthetically different ecology. It has already been noted how the change from wargaming to role-playing involved a syntagmatic shift in the mutual relations of players and game objects. In this case, on the other hand, while the formal, on-screen elements and the player's direct relation to them remained largely the same, the passage from personal computer to home console required the software to adapt to a different mode of engagement.

Bruno (2021a) describes the visual novel apparatus in terms of intimacy.[17] In fact, the personal computer space invites usage from one person at a time—any intrusion potentially spoiling the experience. An analogy could be drawn with computer role-playing games. *Wizardry* requires high concentration and mindfulness of the in-game space. The player may need to keep track of many disparate in-game events, the cost of a misstep being the loss of characters and resources. This individualistic relationship is perfectly exemplified by *Ultima*, as the game keeps track of the time and of the player's age, constructing a frenetic experience which requires high levels of concentration on the user's part.

In contrast, the home console environment hosts a qualitatively different practice. The television, being usually placed in a communal space in the house, rather than in a private room, favours a one-to-many directionality of the information flow. This tendency is also clear when we look at the screen-interface. Home console heads up displays (HUDs) convey considerably more information than their personal computer counterparts. For instance, statistics and character level. This redundancy aims to involve every participant in the activity—be they users or onlookers, in order to let them know what is happening at any moment. In other words, the screen, and its

---

[17] This is clear from his usage of the expression "character intimacy games," although he has engaged more explicitly with the notion of a visual novel apparatus through a media-ecological lens (Bruno 2021b).

position in the room, encapsulate a specific form of engagement, which sees one to several people partaking in a single activity.

This mode of play is clearly supported by paratextual evidence. The release of the first instalment of the game saw a dedicated serialised column in one of the main videogame magazines of the time, *Famirī Konpyūtā Tsūshin*, or *Famitsū* for short. In it, a model of textual-social interaction is produced and clearly presented in an almost pedagogical manner. Starting from the first issue, in 1986, a columnist under the nickname of *Ganma Suzuki* presents himself as the hero, entrusted by the king with the fate of Alefgard (*Arefugado*). He reports his in-game actions and dialogue, reminiscent of replays.[18] After a few lines, a second person enters the frame, *Gēsen Ueno*, who claims to have just finished playing *The Legend of Zelda*. Their interaction is extremely informal, featuring interjections—exclamations being clearly reported on the transcripts—as well as their digressions, such as *Gēsen* talking about his keyboard and computer setup in the second issue of the serialised transcripts. This setup serves to evoke a scene of the two in front of the television screen. *Ganma* is playing, whereas *Gēsen* is only commenting on the game. However, they are both equally engaged and excited about the on-screen action.

Therefore, the practice inscribed in the Nintendo Famicom engenders a different, shared space than that of the personal computer, which, on the contrary, favours an intimate mode of play. The relationship between user and software afforded by the hardware is one-to-one, whereas the Famicom allows more and differing degrees of participation. On the other hand, the features of the hardware constrict to a certain extent the design of the software, which in turn has effects on the mode of consumption. For instance, the simplification of the game mechanics opened the genre to a wider public, while the clarification of the possible actions made group participation viable.

Interestingly, some of the elements which help to construct a more inclusive play setting are the result of previous experiences, rather than overt design choices aimed at opening the information flow. For instance, the HUD displaying the player's possible

---

[18] Replays were a form of serialised fiction which appeared in magazines in the 1980s. They were dramatised transcripts of tabletop play sessions, used as a way to popularise the genre. With the rise in popularity of sword-and-sorcery fantasy in the public imaginary, replays such as *Rōdosutō Senki* ("Record of Lodoss war," Group SNE 1986) gave rise to successful franchises (see also Steinberg 2015a, 2015b; Kamm 2019).

actions derives from earlier efforts to adapt Horii's *Pōtopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* (Enix 1983) from computer to Famicom. The game was an investigative adventure game where the player had to type their actions (e.g. moving to a different location, talking to someone, etc.) on the keyboard. Since the Famicom peripherals did not allow for typing, the programmers came up with the action selection menu (Ishinomori and Takizawa 1990).

4. Final remarks and conclusion: Japanese role-playing?

In a short column appearing in *Voice* magazine, Asada Akira speaks of *J-kaiki* ("return to J"). He frames the insertion of a "J" in front of concepts such as "pop music" ("*J-pop*") to be a form of seclusion, as in "obviously pop, but with a Japanese twist" (2000). The scholar's critique is addressed at the then recent serious turn of the discourse on *otaku* and Japanese subcultures, which were perceived as increasingly more fashionable abroad and as a possible source of leverage for nationalistic rhetoric, as they were another tool to construct an imagined Japan. In other words, claiming the uniqueness of Japanese subcultures and pop culture would create the necessary premises for the development of, and capitalisation on what Miyake (2018) calls "neo-Japonisme," as demonstrated by the then soon-to-come *Cool Japan* campaign (Miyake 2015, 103).

Albeit with a different directionality, a similar phenomenon is that of Japanese role-playing games, often called "JRPGs" by – almost exclusively – non-Japanese audiences. Pelletier-Gagnon (2018) individuates the popularisation of the term at the turn of the millennium, in magazines and online reviews, often with disparaging connotations. The word seems to denote a particular kind of Japan-coded performativity, which is tied to other cultural industries such as those of comic books and animation, or to cute aesthetics (Schules 2015). The Japanese adaptation of the genre, therefore, allegedly imbued it with a certain type of expression, in the same vein as the *anime-esque* (Suan 2017, 2021). In its iterations, role-playing has been adapted, as suggested in the statement by Kondō chosen to open this essay. However, it has indeed been interpreted differently by various communities even at the transition between tabletop and digital. Despite the large overlap between subcultural groups with relatively similar points of reference (e.g., wargaming or Tolkienesque high fantasy), the form of play has undergone heavy modifications.

The software mutated as a function of the limitations of the hardware, as well as of its community. However, this shift was not unidirectional. The community adapted to the affordances of the software, which led to a different form of playful sociality. That said, even the machine on which the software is run has had to be rethought. Relatedly, the emergence of a benchmark for accessible home consoles in Japan, and its later international propagation, may have laid the foundations for a home-console role-playing game to be successful. The convergence of these factors may have influenced the concept of role-playing at the crossing of a national border. The existence of specific cultural industries in Japan may not have informed the notion of JRPG any more than the success of Tolkien-inspired high fantasy has contributed to the making of "RPGs without an adjective." In the same way, the history of media-mixing experimentation (Steinberg 2012) may have facilitated other professionals – Toriyama and Sugiyama – to become part of the project. Comparable efforts were made, albeit less successfully, in the United States, when a D&D TV show aired in the late 1980s (Applecline 2014).

At the same time, the degree to which certain phenomena or behaviours are in fact transnational emerges from this analysis. The computer hobbyists contributed to the crossing of borders by the genre, whose flow established a bridge between communities of players, separated by different technical standards. The initial cultural brokerage (Kamm 2017, 2020), can be thought of as one of the ways in which transcultural flows begin, as evidenced by recent non-Japanese JRPGs. This further reinforces the notion that the drawing of the boundaries of an imagined community often passes through some form of mediation, which renders phenomena such as the transmission of role-playing from the United States to Japan, and the consequent renegotiation of Japan-coded aesthetics, all the more in need of analysis. Kamm's (2020, 19; 231) observations on the construction of "JRPG" as a category finds further confirmation. Not only do differences within the Japanese context should make us question the utility of the label, but also observing its roots, and its future, inter- and transcultural trajectory may be cause for concern. The articulation of difference along cultural faults thus creates the space of possibility which allows the birth of a distinct "Japanese" role-playing genre. The projected otherness solidifies into labels such as "JRPG," where cultural difference acts to isolate the genre from anything already in existence. By contrast, positioning role-playing as an external, soft concept, may allow us to shift to a formulation of culture as an adjectival and contingent dimension of a

phenomenon, rather than as one of its substantial properties.

To conclude, this study has traced a tentative genealogical trajectory of role-playing across different material platforms and sociocultural milieux, as well as media ecologies. It has been proposed that we look at media and genres as possible outcomes in a space of indeterminacy engendered by material and social forces, among other things. Observing media and practices in these terms may constitute a pathway towards a more holistic judgement about their aesthetic potential and limitations. Rather than binding the analysis to social, cultural, or material factors, there may be merit in looking at the space created at their intersection.

REFERENCES

ALTICE, NATHAN (2015), *I Am Error - The Nintendo Family Computer / Entertainment System Platform.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

AOYAMA, YUKO — HIRO IZUSHI (2003), Hardware gimmick or cultural innovation? Technological, cultural, and social foundations of the Japanese video game industry. *Research Policy*, 32, pp. 423-444.

— (2006), Industry evolution and cross-sectoral skill transfers: a comparative analysis of the video game industry in Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom. *Environment and Planning*, 38 pp. 1843-1861.

APPADURAI, ARJUN (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

APPLECLINE, SHANNON (2014), *Designers & Dragons: the 70s - a History of the Roleplaying Game Industry.* San Francisco: Evil Hat Productions.

ARDUINI, ROBERTO (2006), Japan: Reception of Tolkien. In: Michael, D.C. Drout (ed), *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 310-311.

ASADA, AKIRA (2000), J-kaiki no yukue [Whither the return to J]. *VOICE*, 03. http://www.kojinkaratani.com/criticalspace/old/special/asada/voice0003.html.

AZUMA, HIROKI (2007), *Gēmuteki riarizumu no tanjō - Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan 2* [The Birth of Game-like realism - The Animalizing Postmodern 2]. Tokyo: Kōdansha.

— (2009), *Otaku: Japan's database animals.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

BARTON, MATT — SHANE STACKS (2008), *Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-playing Games.* 2019, 2nd Edition. Boca Raton: CRC Press.

BJARNASON, NÖKKVI JARL (2020), A Fantasy without a Dream: Japanese Role-playing Games and the Absence of the Expressive Ideal. *Replaying Japan*, 2, pp. 11-21.

BONENFANT, MAUDE (2010), Le jeu comme producteur culturel: Distinction entre la notion et la fonction de jeu [Play as Cultural Production: The Difference between the Notion and Function Play]. *Ethnologies*, 32 (1), pp. 51-69.

BRUNO, LUCA (2021a), A Glimpse of the Imaginative Environment: Exploring the Potential of Data-driven Examinations of Visual Novel Characters. In: Martin, Roth — Hiroshi, Yoshida — Martin, Picard (eds), *Japan's Contemporary Media Culture between Local and Global - Content, Practice and Theory*. CrossAsia eBooks, pp. 143-170.

— (2021b), "Beyond Software: the Media Ecologies of Character Intimacy Games." Accessed 15 October 2021. Available from https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/19duGB_HhEqplyPgj6_jUYOKd48ZglCQI9s0uOVd8I8s/edit #slide=id.p.

BURDGE, ANTHONY (2006), Gaming. In: Michael, D.C. Drout (ed), *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 228-230.

CAILLOIS, ROGER (1958), *Les jeux et les hommes* [Games and Men]*.* Paris: Gallimard.

CALIFORNIA PACIFIC COMPUTER CO. (1981), *Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness.* Apple II.

CAMPANA, ANDREW (2015), Fold, Flip, Stick: Paper Mario, 2.5-Dimensionality and the Media Mix. *Kinephanos*, pp. 77-111.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD (1984), Inside the Industry. February, pp. 5-6.

— (1986), Inside Ultima IV. March, pp. 19-21.

— (1982), Letters. May-June, pp. 2-3.

CONSALVO, MIA (2016), *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogame in Global Contexts.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

— (2007), Visiting the Floating World: Tracing a Cultural History of Games Through Japan and America. *Proceedings of DiGRA*, pp. 736-741.

CRAWFORD, CHRIS (1981), The Future of Computer Wargaming. *Computer Gaming World*, December, pp. 3-7.

— (1982), *The Art of Computer Game Design.* McGraw-Hill.

DUTTON, WILLIAM H. — EVERETT M. ROGERS — SUK-HO JUN (1987), Diffusion and Social Impacts of Personal Computers. *Communication Research*, 14 (2), pp. 219-250.

ECO, UMBERTO (1990), *I limiti dell'interpretazione* [The Limits of Interpretation]*.* Milano: Bompiani.

— (1998), *Kant e l'ornitorinco* [Kant and the Platypus]. Milano: Euroclub.

ENIX (1986). *Dragon Quest.* Famicom*.*

— (1983), *Pōtopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken*. Famicom*.*

FAMIRĪ KONPYŪTĀ TSŪSHIN (1986), Dōji shinkō rensai RPG jikkyō chūkei 1 - Doragon Kuesuto Hōrōhen [Real-time serialised RPG progress coverage 1 - Dragon Quest]. June, pp. 30-31.

FONTANILLE, JACQUES (2010), L'analyse des pratiques: le cours du sens [The Analysis of Practices: the Course of Meaning]. *Protée*, 38 (2), pp. 9-19.

— (2006), *Pratiques Sémiotiques* [Semiotic Practices]*.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

FOSTER, MIKE (2006), America in the 1960s: Reception of Tolkien." In: Michael, D.C. Drout (ed), *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 14-15.

GROUP SNE (1986), *Rōdosutō Senki*.

GUIDON GAMES (1971), *Chainmail*.

GYGAX, GARY (1985), The influence of Tolkien on the D&D® and AD&D® games: Why Middle Earth is not part of the game world. *Dragon*, March, pp. 12-13.

— (1977), The Origins of D&D. *The Dragon*, June, p. 7.

HAMMER, JESSICA (2007), Agency and Authority in Role-Playing "Texts". In: Michele, Knobel — Colin Lankshear (eds), *A New Literacies Sampler*. Peter Lang, pp. 67-94.

HARVEY, DAVID (2006), Space as a key word. In: David, Harvey (ed), *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. Verso.

HARVIAINEN, J. TUOMAS (2008), A Hermeneutical Approach to Role-Playing Analysis. *International Journal of Role-playing*, pp. 66-78.

HUBER, WILLIAM H (2012), Epic Spatialities: the Production of Space in Final Fantasy. In: Pat, Harrigan — Noah, Wardrip-Fruin (eds), *Third person: Authoring and exploring vast narratives.* Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 373-384.

HUTCHINSON, RACHAEL (2019), *Japanese Culture Through Videogames.* London and New York: Routledge.

HUTCHINSON, RACHAEL — JÉRÉMIE PELLETIER-GAGNON (2022), *Japanese Role-playing Games: Genre, Representation, and Liminality in the JRPG.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

ISHINOMORI, SHŌTARŌ — HIROYUKI TAKIZAWA (1990), Doragon Kuesuto e no michi [Road to Dragon Quest]. Enix.

KAMM, BJÖRN-OLE (2017), Brokers of 'Japaneseness:' Bringing Table-Top J-RPGs to the 'West'. *Mutual Images Journal*, pp. 44-81. http://www.mutualimages-journal.org/index.php/MI/article/view/5.

— (2019), A Short History of Table-Talk and Live-Action Role-playing in Japan: Replays and the Horror Genre as Drivers of Popularity. *Simulation & Gaming*, pp. 50 (5) , pp. 621-644.

— (2020), *Role-Playing Games of Japan - Transcultural Dynamics and Orderings.* London: Palgrave.

KLINE, STEPHEN — NICK DYER-WITHEFORD — GREIG DE PEUTER (2003), *Digital Play: the Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing.* McGill-Queen's University Press.

KOBAYASHI, NOBUSHIGE — YUSUKE KOYAMA (2020), The Early History of the Hobbyist Production Field of Video Games and its Impacts on the Establishment of Japan's Video Game Industries. *Replaying Japan*, 2, pp. 73-82.

KONDŌ, KOSHI (2019), Gemu to iu kagerō no mae ni [Before the Heat of the Game]. *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-playing Game Studies*, pp. 3-4.

KUNTZ, ROB (1978), Tolkien in Dungeons & Dragons. *The Dragon*, April, p. 8.

LAMARRE, THOMAS (2017), Platformativity: Media Studies, Area Studies. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, pp. 285-305.

— (2019), *The Anime Ecology - A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

LAW, GRAHAM (2005), Modes of Publication of Women's Sensation Fiction: Commodities and Communities. *Waseda Global Forum.* Available from https://waseda.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository_uri&item_id=24700&file_id=162&file_no=1.

LEFEBVRE, HENRI (1974), *La production de l'espace* [The Production of Space]. 4th edition (2000). Baden-Baden: Anthropos.

LOPONEN, MIKA — MARKUS MONTOLA (2004), A Semiotic View on Diegesis Construction. In: Markus, Montola — Jaako, Stenros (eds), *Beyond Role and Play: tools, toys, and theory for harnessing imagination.* Helsinki: Ropecon ry, pp. 35-52.

LOTMAN, JURIJ MIKHAJLOVIČ (1992), O semësfere [On the Semiosphere]. In: Jurij Mikhailovič Lotman (ed), *Stat'i po semiotike i topologii kultury*. Tallinn: Aleksandra, pp. 11-24.

MALLINDINE, JAYME DALE (2016), Ghost in the Cartridge: Nostalgia and the Construction of the JRPG Genre. *Gameviroments*, pp. 80-103. https://media.suub.uni-bremen.de/bitstream/elib/3283/1/00105658-1.pdf

MIYAKE, TOSHIO (2015), Towards Critical Occidentalism Studies: Re-Inventing the 'West' and 'Japan' in Mangaesque Popular Culture. In Paolo, Calvetti — Marcella, Mariotti (eds), *Contemporary Japan: Challenges for a World Economic Power in Transition.* Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, pp. 93-116.

— (2018), Il Giappone made in Italy: civiltà, nazione, razza nell'orientalismo italiano [Japan made in Italy: Civilisation, Nation, Race in Italian Orientalism]. In: Matteo, Cestari — Gianluca, Coci — Daniela, Moro — Anna, Specchio (eds), *Orizzonti giapponesi: ricerche, idee, prospettive.* Roma: Aracne, pp. 607-628.

MONTOLA, MARKUS (2008), The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing. The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process. *International Journal of Role-playing*, pp. 22-36.

MURRAY, JANET H. (1997), *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

NINTENDO (2009), Shachō ga kiku "Doragon Kuesuto IX Hoshizora no Mamoribito [Iwata Asks: Dragon Quest IX Sentinels of the Starry Sky]." *Nintendo.co.jp.* August 20. Available from https://www.nintendo.co.jp/ds/interview/ydqj/vol1/index.html (Accessed 15 November 2022).

ŌTSUKA, EIJI (2016), Monogatari rōdōron - Web ue no "atarashii rōdō mondai" o megutte [Theory of Narrative Labour: the "Issue of New Labour" on the Web]. *Waseda Bungaku*, 1021, pp. 53-78.

— (2010), World and Variation: the reproduction and consumption of narrative. *Mechademia*, 5, pp. 99-116.

PELLETIER-GAGNON, JÉRÉMIE (2018), 'Very much like any other Japanese RPG you've ever played': Using undirected topic modelling to examine the evolution of JRPGs' presence in anglophone web publications. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, pp. 135-148.

— (2022), "Is JRPG Old Fashioned?": Genre, Circulation, and Identity Crisis in Black★ Rock Shooter: The Game. In: Rachael, Hutchinson — Jérémie Pelletier-Gagnon (eds), *Japanese Role-playing Games: Genre, Representation, and Liminality in the JRPG*. London: Lexington Books, pp. 97-116.

PETERSON, JON (2012), *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures, from Chess to Role-playing Games.* Fitchburg, WI: Unreason Press.

— (2018), Precursors. In: José Pablo, Zagal — Sebastian, Deterding (eds), *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 53-63.

PETTERSSON, JUHANA (2006), The Art of Experience. In: Thorbiörn, Fritzon — Tobias, Wrigstad (eds), *Role, Play, Art - Collected Experiences of Role-playing*. Föreningen Knutpunkt, pp. 101-108.

PICARD, MARTIN (2013), The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese video games. *Game Studies*, 2 (13). http://gamestudies.org/1302/articles/picard.

SALEN, KATIE — ERIC ZIMMERMAN (2003), *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

— (2006), *The Game Design Reader. A Rules of Play Anthrology.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

SCHULES, DOUGLAS (2015), Kawaii Japan: Defining JRPGs through the Cultural Media Mix. *Kinephanos*, 5, pp. 53-76.

SCHULES, DOUGLAS — JON PETERSON — MARTIN PICARD (2018), Single-Player Computer Role-Playing Games. In: José Pablo, Zagal — Sebastian, Deterding (eds), *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 107-129.

SIR-TECH (1981), *Wizardry - Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*. Apple II

SOFTALK (1981), Marketalk Reviews. August.

STEINBERG, MARC (2012), *Anime's Media Mix: franchising toys and characters in Japan.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

— (2015a), 8-Bit Manga: Kadokawa's Madara, or, The Gameic Media Mix. *Kinephanos*, 5, pp. 40-52.

— (2015b), The Second Kadokawa Media Mix Era: The Rise of the Game Master and the Platform Producer. Available from *Academia.edu.* https://www.academia.edu/35185312/The_Second_Kadokawa_Media_Mi.

— (2019), *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

STENROS, JAAKKO — MARKUS MONTOLA (2010), *Nordic Larp.* Fëa Livia.

SUAN, STEVIE (2021), *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form Beyond Japan.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

— (2017), Anime's performativity: diversity through conventionality in a global media-form. *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, pp. 62-79.

TACTICAL STUDIES RULES (1974), *Dungeons & Dragons*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR.

THIBAULT, MATTIA (2020), *Ludosemiotica: il gioco tra segni, testi, pratiche e discorsi* [Ludosemiotics: Play among Signs, Texts, Practices, and Discourses]. Aracne.

TOBIN, SAMUEL (2013), *Portable Play in Everyday Life: The Nintendo DS.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

WASEDA UNIVERSITY (2016), Jinsei wa hoka no daredemo nai jibun dake no RPG - Doragon Kuesuto Horii Yūji intabyū [The RPG of Your Own Personal Life - Interview to Dragon Quest's Horii Yūji]. *Waseda.jp.* August 09. Availale from https://www.waseda.jp/inst/weekly/features/specialissue-draque2/ (Accessed 10 October 2021).

WHITE, WILLIAM J. — JONNE, ARJORANTA — MICHAEL, HITCHENS — JON, PETERSON — EVAN, TORNER — JONATHAN, WALTON (2018), Tabletop Role-playing Games. In: José Pablo, Zagal — Sebastian, Deterding (eds), *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 63-86.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea MARIUCCI *is a PhD student in Asian Studies at Cornell University. His main fields of interest are media theory and game studies, with a regional focus on Japan. His current research concerns the conceptualisation of transnational movements of technical objects and their often dissonant interaction with various kinds of infrastructures and communities, with a thematic focus on Japan and the aftermath of its pop cultural export over the past decades.*