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Gamevironments, Special Issue: Zines and Early Player Cultures

Deadline: Jun 1, 2026

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Bedroom Journalists? Zines and Early Player Cultures. (Special Issue GAMEVIRONMENTS)

In the 1980s and 1990s, for many computer game enthusiasts, the dream of a job in the games industry often began in their bedrooms: some created their first games on the C64 or Atari, while others wanted to write about games and literally put together their own gaming magazines. However, not much is known about these so-called zines.

Compared to other areas of the history of games and gaming, there has been relatively little research on the histories of print publications as part of cultural histories of gaming cultures in general. There are exceptions to this rule, however, although these exceptions tend to focus on the history of commercial gaming magazines and their contents. The most notable example for this is Graeme Kirkpatrick's book (2015) who investigated the emergence of UK gaming magazines, but especially for magazines in English, there also have been other studies such as Fisher (2015), Summers and Miller (2007, 2014), Cote (2018) or Schmidt et al. (2020) that used gaming magazines as a vehicle to analyse representations of gender and in a similar vein, scholars such as Condis and Morrissette (2023) or Laabs (2023) have also been investigating the famously sexist print ads these magazines used to publish especially in the 1990s and 2000s. Meanwhile, approaches that either focus on the production side of these magazines or try to investigate the fringes of the professional fields these magazines established, are far rarer. Graeme Kirkpatrick touches upon this issue due to his timeframe starting in the early 1980s and others, such as Trammel (2023) tend to brush them as well when incorporating sources such as newsletters into their research. There also are some highly localized studies such as Metzmacher's (2017) dissertation on early German computer magazines that regards these magazines as actors in early networks of computer hobbyists and thus, in part also early gaming enthusiasts.
This special issue aims at this gap by deliberately focusing on the DIY aspect both of early professional gaming magazines same as publications that can be regarded as zines in a more traditional sense such as fanzines, club newsletters, and more. By taking up the term "bedroom coders" (Swalwell 2021, 70) - a diminutive term for hobbyist game developers in the 1980s - and translating it into "bedroom journalists," we also would like to point out that this early gaming culture in particular was characterized by a complex lay DIY culture that, with the possibilities of the first home personal computers at hand allowed not only for developing games at home, but also to write about games and (more or less) successfully distribute the publications.

We seek to bring together scholars interested in the role of DIY fanzines in early player cultures. This includes perspectives from media history, sociology, anthropology, media studies, art and

design history, and/or media aesthetics. We also particularly welcome interdisciplinary perspectives that combine methods from cultural history, fan studies, game studies, and archival research. We invite contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following questions and themes:

- Historical significance: What role did fanzines play in the emergence of player communities and player cultures before the mainstreaming of digital networks? How are DIY cultures in games journalism and games development interwoven?
- Material and aesthetic practices: How were fanzines produced, circulated, and preserved, and what can their materiality tell us about grassroots cultural production of games journalism?
- Knowledge sharing and expertise: How did fanzines serve as platforms for community events, technical advice, or critical debate, and how did they shape perceptions of expertise within player cultures?
- Identity and community formation: In what ways did fanzines contribute to the construction of collective identities and player communities, whether through gendered perspectives, subcultural affiliations, interactions with their readers, or political engagement?
- Comparative and cross-cultural approaches: How did fanzine practices vary across regions, platforms, or gaming genres, and what can these differences reveal about the global diversity of early player cultures?
- Preservation and memory: What challenges and opportunities exist for archiving and studying these fragile artifacts today?

Abstracts and Deadline
For all contributions, please submit an abstract (300-500 words) with a title and a short biography (100-150 words) for each author until 01.06.2026 to arno.goergen@hkb.bfh.ch or aurelia.brandenburg@hkb.bfh.ch.

Timeline
⬚ Notification of acceptance of abstracts: 15.06.2026
⬚ Full text submission by authors to the guest editors: 15.12.2026
⬚ Publication: Summer 2027

Submission Details
Full articles should be 5.000-10.000 words in length and will be peer-reviewed. We also encourage other contributions such as interviews or research reports that may not fit the typical format of a research article if they fit the scope of the Special Issue. For further information on possible formats and their different editorial processes, see gamevironments' submission guidelines.

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