

The Making of the World in Board Games

Deadline: Jun 8, 2026

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Transporting childhood through play: the making of the world in board games, 19th-20th centuries.

“By transporting us to these tropical and transoceanic regions that we were so often already imagining, the beautiful images in this game allow us to see, so to speak, the beautiful sights of these countries brought to life.”

With these words, the game *Dans les colonies* (1900) invites young players to a vicarious experience of colonialism. The cards inside the box bear witness to the circulation of games and the ideas they conveyed throughout Western Europe and North America: the name of each region is written in German, while the rules are translated into approximate French. From versions of 'Around the World in 80 Days' to board games featuring explorers, tourists, cyclists or motorists setting out to discover the wonders of the globe, games offering playful versions of geographical exploration became increasingly popular from the 19th century onwards.

These games illustrate the convergence of several major trends that developed in 19th-century Europe and continue to influence the 20th and 21st centuries: the massification of school education, with a particular emphasis, in France, on the teaching of geography after the defeat of 1870, and a growing interest in innovative teaching methods; the massive development of visual culture, with important technical advances such as lithography and chromolithography; the development of means of transport that transformed the relationship to global space; strong political investment in imperialist and colonial enterprises; and the mobilization of children in international conflicts, from the First World War to the Cold War. From the rise of colonization in the 19th century to contemporary globalisation, this issue will examine how games (board games, lotto, card games, puzzles, paper cut-out figures, and miniature theaters) bring the world within reach of players through illustrated material media. Although numerous studies have already analysed video games from postcolonial perspectives, analog games remain relatively understudied in this regard. Taking a long-term historical perspective, this issue will pay particular attention to recent games such as *Settlers of Catan* (1996), renamed *Catan* in 2015, in light of older examples. This broad chronology will allow us to assess the critical positioning that has developed in board games since the 1990s.

This issue will examine the objects in question in terms of their materiality to understand the effect of games on our perception of global space. This includes the reduction of mountains and mountains to a domestic and child-friendly scale; the adaptation of maps to the space of the game board in a setting that combines conquest and discovery; and the repetition of familiar –

and often stereotypical – images of faraway places and 'others'. It will consider the overt and implicit ideological positioning that underlies the various game mechanics, and the gestures and attitudes those imply on the part of the players: grid-based classification, resource extraction, conquest, and even violence reproduced on a symbolic scale. We will focus in particular on the way in which games mobilize the bodies involved in the game: what positions are taken, what interactions occur between players, and what rituals are established around board games?

While the scientific literature on board games is dominated by English-language references, this issue will focus on presenting games from diverse cultures, analyzing their transnational circulations. These are illustrated, for example, by ethnographer Stewart Culin's research on Japanese sugorokus and North American indigenous games. The issue will also address the phenomena of recycling and remediation: for instance, Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* was, as mentioned above, turned into several games across France and Europe. In the United States, it became the background of a newspaper serial by journalist Nellie Bly, a serial which then itself gave way to a new game, *Around the World with Nellie Bly*.

Proposals may address one or several of the following questions, without being limited to these suggestions:

- the material dimension of games and its articulation with representations of global space
- the intermediality of games, and in particular their relationship with fiction
- the gestures and bodily attitudes involved in play
- the aestheticization of faraway places, and of cultural and ethnic difference
- the representation of natural spaces and landscapes, intersections with the natural sciences and anthropology
- the importance of transport and communication technologies
- the construction of national identities, the dissemination of imperialist and racist discourse
- the staging of colonial "conquest," war, and violence
- cultural transfers at play in the games
- competition and international exchanges between game publishers

Calendar

Submission of proposals:

Proposals for articles (approximately 3,000 characters, including spaces) – abstracts including methodological aspects and the issue addressed, accompanied by a short biography and bibliography – should be sent before 8 June 2026 to the *Strenae* journal (strenae@afreloce.fr).

Submission of articles:

Finalized articles (30,000 to 40,000 characters including spaces, spaces and notes) must be submitted by February 1st, 2026. They may be written in English or French. Authors writing in a language other than their mother tongue must have their text proofread by a native speaker before submission. Articles must comply with the journal's guidelines for authors: <https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/200>

Revisions and publication:

Publication is scheduled for November 2027.

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