to move forward in technological development. Intervention therefore means creating and contributing to an existing system in order to challenge assumptions and offer new ways of proceeding. We see how games traverse the spaces where once they might have been pigeonholed. Through their nature as play within the ludic transversal, they are a pure electrate practice, thus bridging the dichotomy of work/play and becoming an inter/vention.

As we move further into the digital era, the concept of electracy will gain more attention, just as literacy gained attention in oral culture. Holmevik's work tells us that play—with its impact on digitally mediated environments of gaming—is deeply embedded as an inter/vention in being electrate. This book will become a reference and a seminal work in understanding the place of play in electracy.

—Hannah R. Gerber, *Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX*

The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect
Chris Melissinos and Patrick O'Rourke
New York: Welcome Books, 2012.
Contents, images, credits. 215 pp. $40.00
paper. ISBN: 9781599621098

The Art of Video Games, by Chris Melissinos and Patrick O'Rourke, published in cooperation with the Smithsonian American Art Museum, is a catalog and companion to a high-profile exhibition of the same name that opened at the Smithsonian facility in Washington, DC, in 2012 and is scheduled to travel to many regional museums. This is a lushly illustrated coffee-table book that offers readers full-page, color photographs and succinct summaries of video games, descriptions of their significance, and interviews with many of their creators. Slick and gorgeous, the book offers an important permanent, widely distributable, inexpensive complement to the exhibition.

Given the noise the Smithsonian exhibition has stirred up, the bar was high for Melissinos and O'Rourke: the authors needed to prove video games worthy of the moniker "art" and of their standing as part of the "record of the American experience," to pull a quote from the museum's publicity. But for those of us who have long been making, studying, using, and advocating for video games, the mere fact of the exhibit and its publication counts as a success—not so much because the likes of game designers David Crane and Ron Gilbert now find a place beside artists David Hockney and Mary Cassatt, but because video games *do* belong in a record of the American experience. Melissinos and O'Rourke deserve praise for having spearheaded the project.

Beyond that abstract victory, *The Art of Video Games* is a bittersweet triumph for those with a more nuanced interest in and understanding of video game history. The book's organization of the history of video games into five eras offers an admirable summary of the key trends and shifts in the gaming landscape. Of course, so did earlier illustrated histories such as Rusel DeMaria and Johnny L. Wilson's *High Score! The Illustrated History of Video Games* (McGraw Hill, 2002), though the latter never reached beyond the enthusiast and is now out of print.

But while the shiny pages and full-color spreads telegraph official approval, the content is sometimes incomplete and inaccurate. I will pick as an example something I know well, the 1977 Atari Video Computer System (VCS), also known as the Atari 2600. The authors get a lot right. Their coverage of VCS titles such as *Pitfall!* and the Atari port of *Pac-Man*, for example, discusses the important technical and historical situations that influenced the creation of these games. But they are less sure-footed in their discussion of *Combat*, the pack-in title that shipped with the Atari VCS in 1977. They correctly identify it as a port of the Key Games title *Tank*, but they also draw the conclusion that "developers were just starting to learn how to wring experience from the new platform. As such, *Combat* was a two-player activity with no computer-controlled competitor in the game" (p.15). There's no denying that the title is two-player only, but the reasons for that are more complicated than this conclusion warrants. In fact, video games of the mid-1970s were primarily two-player head-to-head affairs, and the VCS platform was designed to facilitate such experiences—and not much else. The authors write from a contemporary view, one in which a video game that requires two players is anomalous. Melissinos and O'Rourke probably know this well, but in the couple hundred words they devote to each of the titles the book covers, omissions sometimes lead to misunderstandings. That *Combat* is the first game discussed in the book makes these limitations particularly noticeable.

While *The Art of Video Games* shouldn't be mistaken for a traditional piece of academic scholarship, there is no doubt that the book's target audience will learn things they might not otherwise have considered. Few will really read the book as an argument—it is a coffee-table book, after all. In this respect, the book must be understood as a printed, bound version of the gallery notes that accompany the exhibition. An astute reader, particularly one accustomed to exhibition catalogs, might observe that the best such catalogs take advantage of the medium of print to go into greater detail than might be possible on gallery walls. In that respect, Melissinos and O'Rourke miss an opportunity to explore in deeper detail some of the points they can raise only briefly on the gallery walls.

Perhaps there lies the problem *The Art of Video Games* really poses: how seriously should we take games as a cultural form from the perspective of institutionalization and historical record? Seriously enough to put them in the Smithsonian for a spell, but what does that accomplishment signify? Does it mean that games have been recognized as art? Or just that—even though the book includes as much material from Japan as it does from the United States—the games have been recognized as Americana, that they have more in common with the American Art Museum's collections of graphic art, folk art, crafts, and decorative art?

This problem is not addressed in *The Art of Video Games*. In her foreword, Smithsonian American Art Museum director Elizabeth Broun seems to take the whole affair as a kind of curiosity, like something that happened while she was at lunch. "I owe a huge debt of thanks to Chris Melissinos," she writes, "for helping us bridge the gap between the traditions of an art museum and the vast world of

gaming" (p. 7). But this gap has been in the process of being closed by creators and curators for more than two decades, from artists like Cory Arcangel and Mary Flanagan to curators like the Whitney Museum of American Art's Christiane Paul and the American Museum of the Moving Image's Carl Goodman to institutions like The Strong through its International Center for the History of Electronic Games. If the book's primary accomplishment amounts to its association with the Smithsonian, then it leaves the serious reader with a challenge. Once the ceremony and bluster wears off, once video games have been dubbed art by a hallowed cultural and historical institution, shouldn't we have bigger, more interesting aspirations for them?

—Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games LLC, Atlanta, GA*

The Art of Video Games was an exhibition by the Smithsonian American Art Museum which was on display from March 16, 2012 through September 30, 2012. The exhibition was designed to highlight the evolution of art within the video game medium over its forty-year history. Following its time at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the exhibition toured to 10 additional venues in the United States. Chris Melissinos, founder of Past Pixels and collector of video games and gaming systems, was the curator of As a testament to the cultural impact of the game industry's mega morph, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with curator and author Chris Melissinos, conceived the forthcoming exhibition, The Art of Video Games, which will run from March 16 to September 30, 2012.* Welcome Books will release the companion book this March. Melissinos presents video games as not just mere play, but richly textured emotional and social experiences that have crossed the boundary into culture and art. Along with a team of game developers, designers, and journalists, Melissinos chose a pool of 240 games across five That's right, video games as art, not the art in video games as exhibitions like Into The Pixel show case every year at E3, the exhibition showcases video games as an art form. "Game play is central amongst mammals and video games is a form of expression," he continued, "I'm not surprised to see the growth in online games. Readers with interest in video games or American Pop culture will find this a fascinating book. Each game covered is spread over two pages, illustrated with the best art from the game and screen shots of game details, with a narrative that describes the game and touches on the design as well as the current events be it technology or society that it relates to. As appropriate, future sequels and how it affected future games are also mentioned. The playable games are Pac-Man, Super Mario Brothers, The Secret of Monkey Island, Myst, and Flower. The Smithsonian American Art Museum invited the public to help select the video games to be included in the exhibition. The 240 games on the ballot were selected by Chris Melissinos, who worked with the museum and an advisory group consisting of game developers, designers, industry pioneers, and journalists. The games were selected based on a variety of criteria, including visual effects, creative use of new technologies, and how the game fit into the narrative of the exhibition. Voting took place between February 14 and April 17, 2011. More than 3.7 million votes were cast by 119,000 people in 175 countries!

The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect is a worthy companion piece to the Smithsonian American Art Museum's exhibit. Melissinos and O'Rourke do an excellent job of laying a foundation for any reader to educate themselves on video games and their place as a modern artform. Video game enthusiasts have a lot to enjoy here, too. Besides the first-rate production values, it is a lovingly crafted narrative of the industry's evolution from its most rudimentary beginnings to the multi-billion dollar cultural powerhouse it is today. Any fan of video games will enjoy the opportunity to pick this book up from the coffee table, flip to a random page, and immediately begin to "remember when…" The playable games are Pac-Man , Super Mario Brothers , The Secret of Monkey Island , Myst , and Flower . The Smithsonian American Art Museum invited the public to help select the video games to be included in the exhibition. The games were selected based on a variety of criteria, including visual effects, creative use of new technologies, and how the game fit into the narrative of the exhibition. After the exhibition closes in Washington D.C., The Art of Video Games toured across the country to a number of museums, including: Boca Raton Museum of Art in Boca Raton, Florida (October 24, 2012 – January 13, 2013); EMP Museum in Seattle, Washington (February 16, 2013 – May 13, 2013); Phoenix Art Museum in Phoenix, Arizona (June 16, 2013—September. The Art of Video Games was an exhibition by the Smithsonian American Art Museum which was on display from March 16, 2012 through September 30, 2012. The exhibition was designed to highlight the evolution of art within the video game medium over its forty-year history. Following its time at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the exhibition toured to 10 additional venues in the United States. Chris Melissinos, founder of Past Pixels and collector of video games and gaming systems, was the curator of...