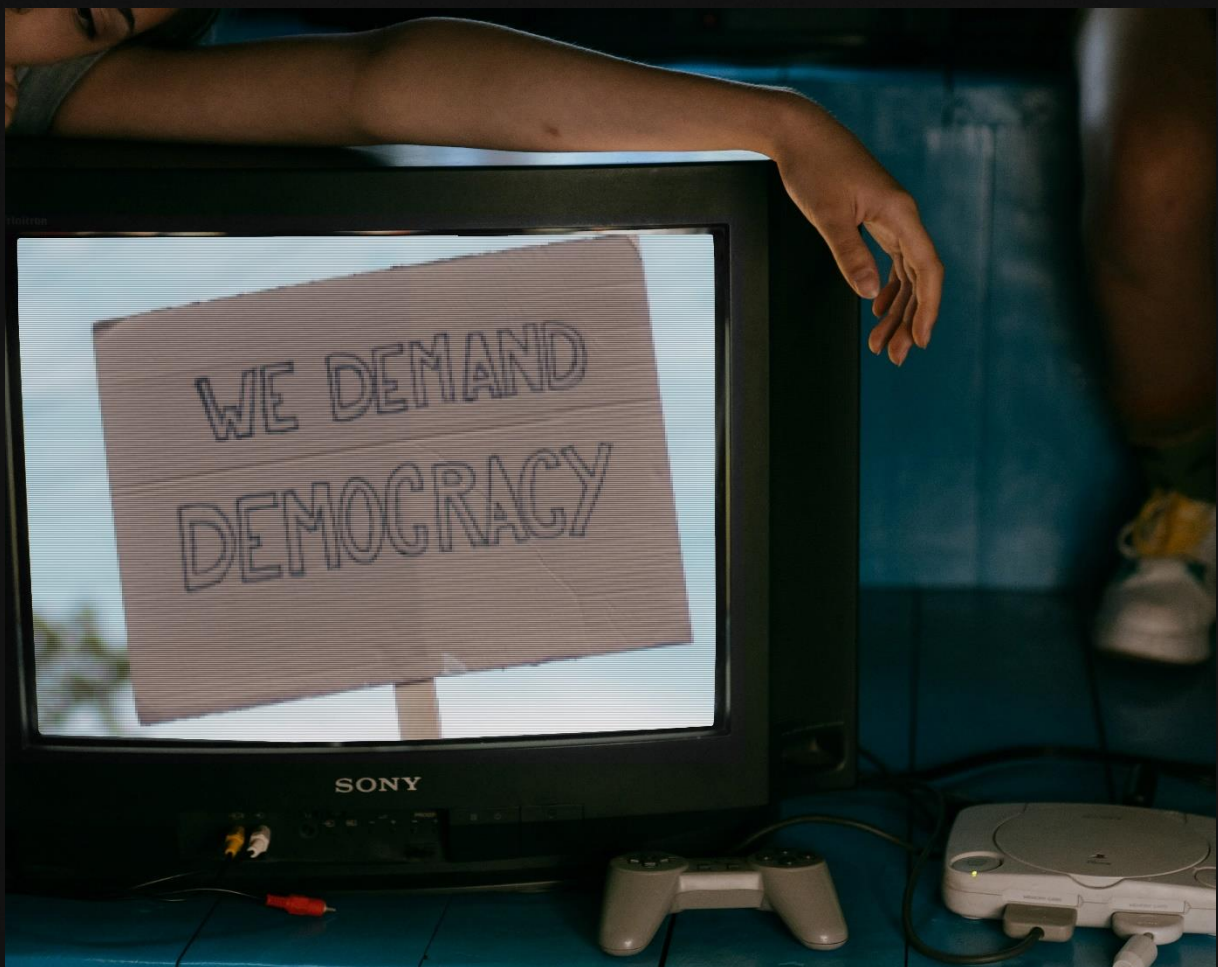


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simulation ludology narrative



Untitled. © Collage by Felix Zimmermann. Photos by cottonbro, Pexels, and Fred Moon, Unsplash.

players to ask what kind of propaganda, which articles of faith, will function best to undermine or uphold the promises of a given ideology.

While historical theming in board games is relatively commonplace, an exploration of the creation of history itself is decidedly less so. Games, when framed intelligently, can make explicit the idea that history is fundamentally contingent. The way that we tell stories to each other, either in academic discourse or in common parlance, changes based on how we interpret the facts associated with a given narrative. While there is no way to undo past actions, there are many divergent ways of explaining the causes, effects, and meanings of those past actions. *Historiography*, or the study of history itself, is the process by which we go back to the future, often daring to ask, what if it was otherwise? Does A necessarily lead to B? Or can we imagine alternative directions, headings, or chronologies for the past? How does the way the way that we tell stories to each other effect the way that we orient ourselves in the world?

Rather than reflecting on the process and creation of history itself, board games have typically used history as a staging ground for an entertaining gaming experience. *Wir sind das Volk!* points out a path forward for games interested in representing historiographical themes. It does this by reappropriating elements from wargames (Perla, 1990) and eurogames (Woods, 2012).

The Eurogame/Wargame Dichotomy

In the book *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (2012), Stewart Woods suggests that the Allies, through a variety of post-war denazification policies, steered many of West Germany’s cultural industries towards cultural pacifism (Woods 2012, 57). While American board game titles like *Risk* (1957)

the facts associated with what did and what did not happen at a particular battleground. The geopolitical, social, and ideological intricacies that surround a given battle, particularly as these features apply to a larger examination of how we remember war and conflict, are sidelined in the name of simulating the fun of player-to-player conflict. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this rule: for example, titles like *Labyrinth: The War on Terror* (2001). However, in general, both eurogames and wargames have not emphasized historiographical themes.

Though speculative, the reason for this lack of emphasis may be due to the complexities associated with tracing counterfactual narratives. Historiography, which often contemplates *what if* questions, is typically produced in written form. While games, on various platforms, have entertained alternative histories, they have typically entertained this type of contingency only insofar as it provides a platform for an entertaining gaming experience. One can submit that the enormous complexity associated with tactfully addressing historical *what if* questions has steered many game publishers away from the topic. While *Wir sind das Volk!* may not represent a catch-all solution to this problem, or even a perfect example of historiographical research in game form, it does provide a unique roadmap for publishers interested attempting to strike a balance between historical complexity, accuracy, and accessibility. The primary way it achieves this balance is by remixing popular gameplay markers from both the eurogame and wargame.

***Wir sind das Volk!* A Balance between East and West**

At the start of the game, players are greeted to *Wir sind das Volk!*'s game board, a top-down view of East and West Germany. Each Federal State of Germany (or Bundesländer in the German version of the game) is in total disarray. Having just lost

