

Videogames in Computer Space: The Complex History of Pong

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Computer games such as Spacewar! and Adventure were created in institutions, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, BBN, and Stanford University, that defined the main streams of computing research during the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Telling the stories of these games reveals the emergence of “university games” out of laboratories and research centers.² The institutional contexts of Spacewar and Adventure suggest an important, and at times underappreciated, relationship between exploratory work in computer science and the early history of computer games. Both games grew out of the very institutions that played an essential role in defining time-shared and then networked computing in its early days. Games such as these exemplified the technical mastery of programmers and hardware hackers. These links between games and computing recall Brian Sutton-Smith’s argument that games are fundamentally “problems in adaptation” and that computer games specifically address the problem that “is the computer.”³

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