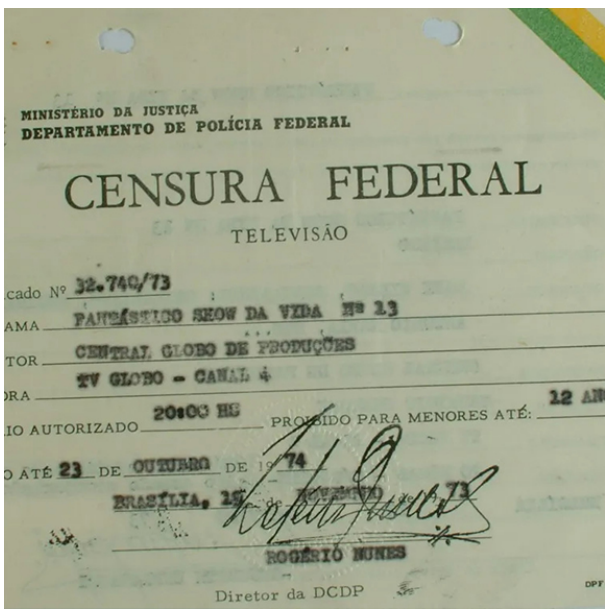

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Translations

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Keywords

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From Leisure Electronics to Game Creation

Daniel Roux's Role in Swiss Game History

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Editor's Note

This interview is an English translation of a conversation originally conducted, transcribed, and published in French. The interview was conducted by Pierre-Yves Hurel and Sophie Bemelmans and translated into English by the authors. The original French publication can be found in the "Interviews" section of *ROMchip*, Volume 7, No. 1.

Introduction

Figure 1

Portrait of Daniel Roux, captured from "Blupi explore… L'Histoire du jeu vidéo suisse," a video recording of a public conference at the University of Lausanne, organized by Prof. Yannick Rochat and Prof. David Javet, September 9, 2019, posted September 27, 2019, by the University of Lausanne, YouTube video, 1:28:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iea_6DIFCmY (Courtesy of the author)

In February 1978, the French-speaking Swiss company Epsitec was founded under the management of Cathi Nicoud. Its aim was to manufacture and market Smaky microcomputers, designed at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (Ecole Polytechnique de Lausanne, EPFL) by Jean-Daniel Nicoud and his team, and to develop various software programs to accompany these platforms. Although Smaky ceased to be manufactured in the 1990s, Epsitec has continued to focus on software development for other platforms right up to the present day. Over its forty-six-year history, Epsitec has published several video games, mainly developed by Daniel Roux.[1]

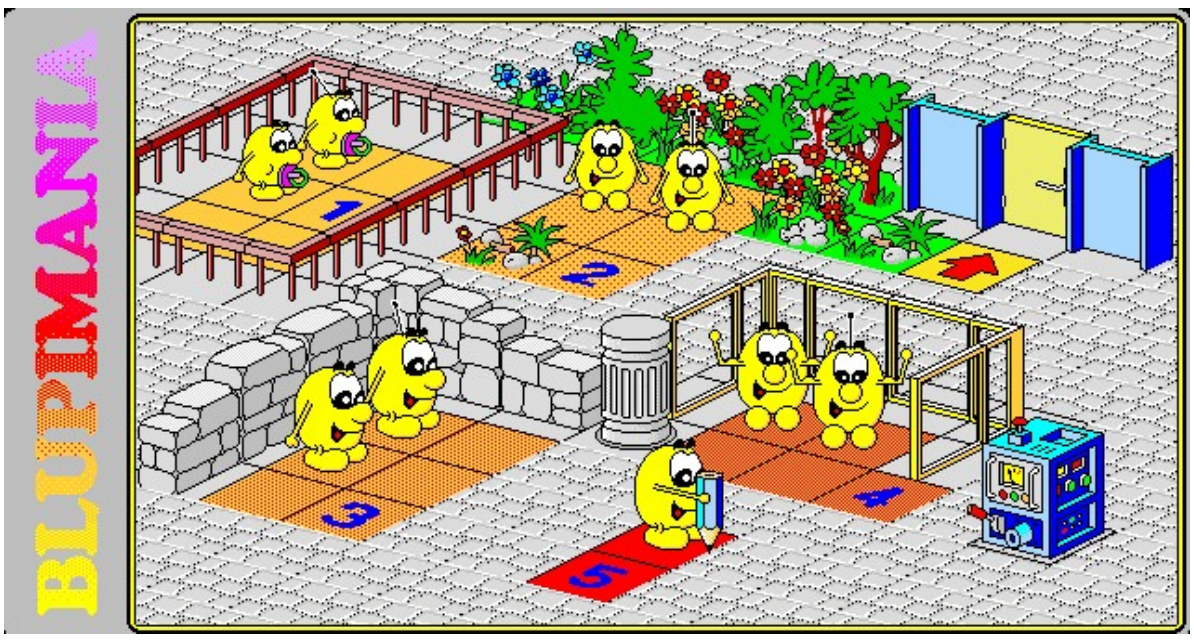
Figure 2

A Smaky 6 computer (1978–82)—a beige solid box with two floppy drives and a monitor—running a floppy disk with games and demonstrations (Photograph by Prof. Yannick Rochat, October 24, 2023) (Courtesy of the author)

Daniel Roux, a Prolific Swiss Developer

Daniel Roux was born in 1958 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. In his late teens, in the 1970s, Daniel Roux was intrigued by computers, those "big things that filled whole rooms." However, there was no training in computer science at the time, and his only choice was to study electrical engineering at the École Technique Supérieure in Le Locle, which "bored him" but was closest to his interests. He finally abandoned his studies when he seized the opportunity to join Jean-Daniel Nicoud's team in his laboratory at EPFL.[2] He was then employed by Epsitec from 1978 to 2023. He created numerous software programs for the company and was gradually able to put video games at the center of his work in the late 1980s.[3] His creations most often featured a little yellow ovoid character named Blupi (also known as Toto or Eggbert).

Figure 3



Screenshot of a colorized illustration from *Blupimania* (1994–96, Smaky), running in the Smaky Infini emulator (1999–2008, EPSITEC SA), March 26, 2025 (Image courtesy of Sophie Bémelmans)

Figure 4

The first advertisement by Epsitec-System SA to feature Daniel Roux's Blupis, (*Eleclub* , no. 89–90 [Feb.–Mar. 1979]) (Image courtesy of Sophie Bémelmans)

Born in a comic strip Roux made in 1977, this character has been part of the Epsitec and Smaky visual identity since at least 1979. He was indeed featured in advertisements, manuals, interfaces, and so on created by Daniel Roux. The first in this series of Blupi games was *Toto à la maison* (Toto at home) in 1988, and the last published by Epsitec was *Blupimania II* in 2003, marking the end of the company's game publishing. Daniel Roux continued his career at Epsitec by developing other software programs for the company such as *Crésus Comptabilité*, an accounting package that is still the company's flagship product today. He's had to put video games on the back burner, at least professionally. In his spare time, however, he created three games for Windows Phone in 2013, then took advantage of his retirement to release a new game in 2024 entitled *Blupi Is Back*.[4]

Figure 5

Main menu of *Blupi Is Back* (2024), a video game available for Android and Windows ("Blupi Is Back," Blupi's Games, Maniabricks.com, accessed December 3, 2024, https://www.maniabricks.com/games/blupi-is-back)

About the Interview

Our shared interests in the history of the Smaky (the topic of Sophie Bémelmans's doctoral thesis) and the history of video games in French-speaking Switzerland (the subject of Pierre-Yves Hurel's postdoctoral research) led us to meet with Daniel Roux. He welcomed us into his home on January 23, 2024, (just a few months before the release of his new game) to talk face-to-face about his career and the role he has played in the Swiss video game industry. The interview was conducted in French, the mother tongue of all three of us, and lasted almost two hours. We covered several themes in this interview, which we report as follows.[5] We started by discussing Daniel Roux's involvement in hobbyist electronics as a teenager to see if there is a connection between hobbyist electronics and his activities on computers. Then, we moved to his work as a game creator: first, his singular position as a professional game maker in French-speaking Switzerland, and second, his own experience of game creation and his motivations. We ended the interview with a discussion at a more meta level, inviting him to reflect on his own trajectory and the evolution of the level of recognition he has received.

A Practice Rooted in Leisure Electronics

The French-speaking part of Switzerland was a particularly fertile ground for the development of hobbyist electronics. Between the seventies and the eighties, many clubs were created in the region, especially in the Vaud canton. Indeed, in the early seventies, the Vaudois Electronics Group (Groupement de l'Electronique Vaudoise, GEV) was organized to encourage young people to take up careers in electronics. The group's aim was to strengthen the Vaud electronics industry, and it notably provided financial and human support to the region's electronics clubs via the electronics clubs committee headed by Jean Daniel Nicoud, which brought together the various clubs. At the same time, they created the ELEGEV magazine (which became ELECLUB in 1975 and finally ELEMICRO in 1980) which provided club news as well as information on electronics. They also organized regular contests between the members of the different clubs. These clubs attracted people involved in model-making (railroads, aeronautics, etc.), tinkering with electric music amplifiers, practicing amateur radio, and so on. They experienced the arrival of transistors and then microprocessors, which were seen as a new toy that had to be explored to uncover its potential uses.[6]

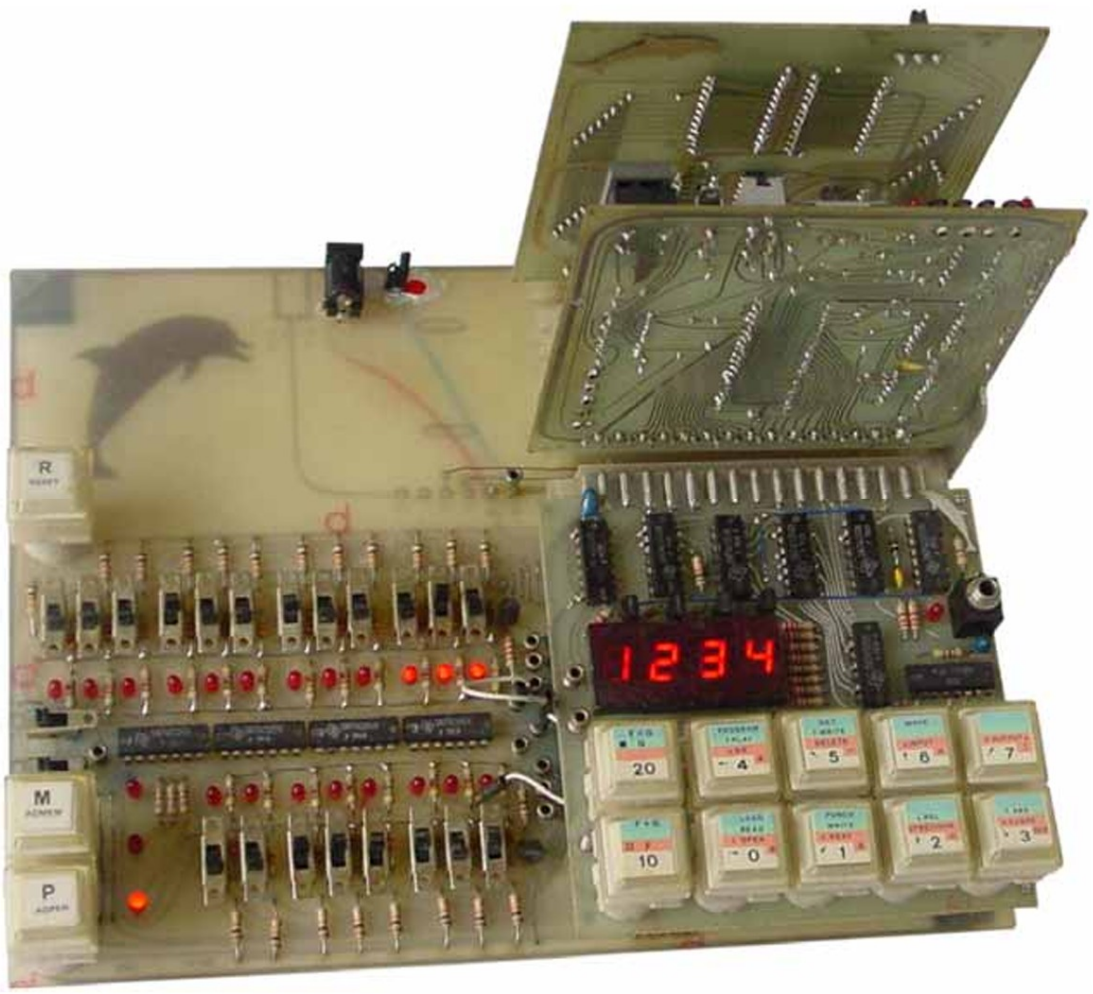
This interview was conducted as part of the Confœderatio Ludens project.[7] This project brings together around fifteen researchers based in Bern, Zurich, and Lausanne, and is devoted to the history of Swiss video games, using a cross-disciplinary approach (social and historical sciences, close reading of works, code analysis, creation of databases, experimental archaeology, etc.). Part of the preliminary work consists of unearthing forgotten video games. According to our current observations, these video games were characterized by their limited commercial ambitions (often amateur projects), short lifespan, and unprofitability. In French-speaking Switzerland, to our knowledge, Daniel Roux was one of the few people who could create video games as part of his job; his history is therefore rather unusual given the regional context. This situation was made possible by Cathi Nicoud, who compromised to allow Daniel Roux to do what he liked as long as he pursued his more serious projects, which were financially more profitable. Beyond his personal experience, Daniel Roux's career makes him an important witness to the early days of Epistec. His testimony helps us to understand the relationships and the horizontal, even familial, workings of the company and in particular, the role of Cathi Nicoud, which has been overlooked. It should also be noted that, at the time of our interview with Daniel Roux, his work had been gaining new recognition for a few years, although this was not always the case.[8] Indeed, some twenty years ago, thinking them useless, he threw away a whole series of archives, including the source codes for some of his first games.

Interview on January 23, 2024 (translated from French)

Pierre-Yves Hurel [PYH]: In an interview you gave not so long ago to the newspaper *24 Heures*, there's an article where you mention having seen an advertisement for a kit computer in an electronics magazine. Could you tell us a bit about that moment?[9]

Daniel Roux [DR]: Yes, it was a kit computer called the Dauphin. And I suppose it was my parents who had subscribed me to an electronics magazine. It was a magazine about electronics, talking about transistors, resistors, and not at all about computers since they didn't exist yet. And then one day, there was an ad in the magazine for a microcomputer kit. But you really shouldn't imagine it as a computer like the ones we have today. I don't know if you've ever seen photos of the Dauphin. It's a board with components. There's no casing, no screen. And when I saw it, something just clicked right away. I don't really know why. And then I immediately called to order one. And there was a lovely lady who answered and said, "Yes, yes, we'll send it to you." Later, I learned that this lady was Mrs. Nicoud, who was Jean-Daniel Nicoud's wife and the director of Epsitec for, I don't know, a long time. And I also later found out that she had sent me kit number one. I was the first because I was so quick. And I assembled it very quickly. And you have to imagine, there was no screen, no keyboard, nothing at all.

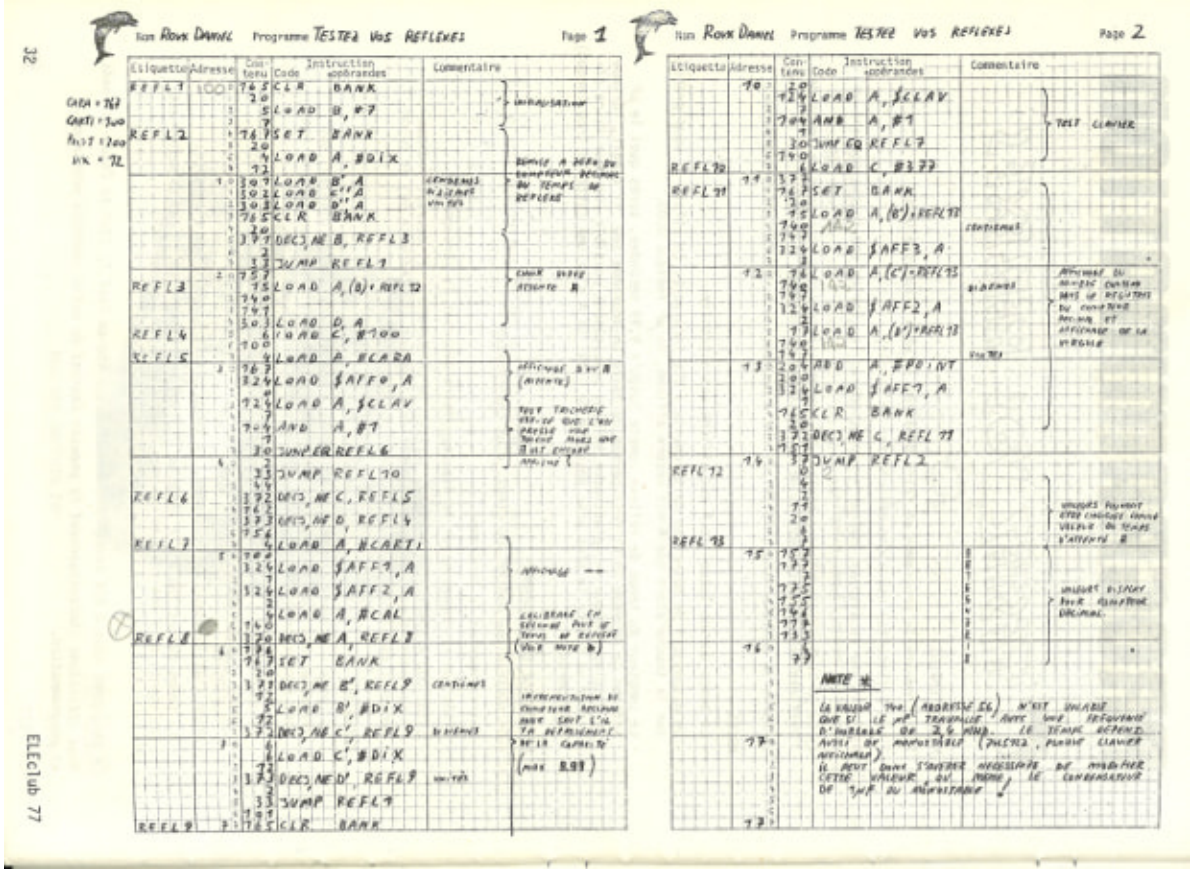
Figure 6



The Dauphin, a kit computer designed by Jean-Daniel Nicoud in 1977 (Daniel Roux, *Comprendre les microprocesseurs* [Yverdon-les-Bains: EPSITEC SA, 2007], 4)

You had to program it using little binary switches, entering the codes one by one. It was very, very slow. And very quickly, I wrote a little program called *Testez vos réflexes* [Test Your Reflexes], which couldn't be saved.[10] Every time you wanted to use it again, you had to redo all the little switches and everything. […] There was a seven-segment display. And the program I had made—I don't remember exactly how it worked, but I think it probably made one segment blink. Then, after a random amount of time, suddenly all the segments would light up. You had to quickly press a button, and my program would simply calculate the time the user took between the message appearing and pressing the button. Then it would display the time the user took. That's all. So, you had to wait, and as soon as it lit up, poof, you pressed the button as fast as possible, and you'd get a number displayed. That's it.

Figure 7



Original code of *Testez vos réflexes* , a program for the Dauphin kit computer (*Eleclub* , no. 72 [May 1977])

DR: So actually, that's what I had written. [*He shows us the original document of* Testez vos réflexes *code seen in fig. 7.*] You had to start by writing it out on a sheet of paper. It is machine code. The instructions one after the other. And then there had to be ... No, there aren't the codes? Oh yes! Here they are binary codes. These are all the codes that had to be entered manually at each ... at the consecutive addresses. [...]

PYH: Did you have any other hobbies at the time, like model building, amateur radio, or things like that?

DR: I used to tinker a lot with electronics, not yet with computers. For example, I modified a toy, an old vehicle, some kind of tracked tank, with photoelectric cells so you could control it with a flashlight. Stuff like that. I still have it somewhere. That's one of the rare things I kept. So it wasn't even digital electronics; it was analog, with transistors and things like that. So those were my hobbies. And it's true, I forgot to mention one thing—I also used to draw a lot at that time. Before, those were the two main things: electronics and drawing. […] In my childhood room, I had sewn a copper wire into the carpet, so it was invisible. By sending a fairly high-frequency oscillation through that wire, my famous tracked vehicle could follow it. It just had two detectors. When it reached the wire, the detector would pick up the signal, amplify it, and send a command to the motor to turn in the opposite direction. And like that, "vroom, vroom, vroom," it moved forward. It impressed everyone because it looked like it was following a precise track, but it was actually this invisible wire. […]

PYH: And so, do you see a continuity between these tinkering projects and the use of the first computers?

DR: There's a direct continuity in the sense that the arrival of the microprocessor made it possible to … boost all these tinkering projects. To do things much better than what could be done with just electronics. I think that's it.

PYH: Did you also go to electronics clubs? If so, what was the atmosphere like?

DR: Yes, well, at that time, Jean-Daniel Nicoud was a professor and had his lab at EPFL. He always had a vocation for teaching young people. So, he did something at that time that was totally unconventional—he opened his lab to kids, even though it was at EPFL, where normally not just anyone could be there. And he made all the equipment available to them. At that time, I had been hired by him at EPFL, and I was supervising the young people in those labs. […] The atmosphere was a joyful mess. As far as I know, no one explained anything at all. There weren't any lessons or anything like that. People would just show up and—well, I don't know—they'd try to make something. So, I would advise one person, say, "Well, you could do it like this." And then we'd exchange ideas. It was completely

informal.

Figure 8

Portrait of Jean-Daniel Nicoud next to a Smaky 2 computer, 1975 (Cathi Nicoud, *LAMI: Labo Microformatique EPFL* , accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.hb9afo.ch/histoire/lami.pdf)

Sophie Bémelmans [SB]: And did you learn by experimenting like that, or did you try to—I don't know—get magazines that explained things about electronics? Or when you created your first program, was it pure trial and error? How did it happen?

DR: Yeah, it was really pure trial and error because there weren't any magazines talking about that. It came later, actually. I think I took a few programming courses, but I didn't stick with them for long because it was too far from what interested me, so I really learned ... I'm not quite sure how, actually. Yes, by trying.

PYH: What was your experience with electronic games and video games? Did you have any games to put on the TV, like *Pong*? Were there arcade halls? Do you remember the first video game you saw, for example?

DR: Well, I'm not sure if there were arcade halls, but I didn't frequent them. I never had any game consoles. So, I later played games on a PC, but that was much later. So no, I didn't really have access to games. One of the very first games I made—well, it's more than just a *Testez vos réflexes* type of game, as it had an embryonic graphical screen and everything—was *Flipper* [Pinball] on the Smaky 6. And it's quite funny because when I wrote that game, I had never even played on a real pinball machine in a bar.

Figure 9

Smaky 6 computer running *Flipper* , a pinball-style video game created by Daniel Roux around 1980 (Photograph by Prof. Yannick Rochat, May 2024) (Courtesy of the author)

PYH: Oh yes! But in that case, had you played another pinball game? Another electronic pinball game?

DR: I don't think it existed. Well, I don't know. No. In any case, I hadn't played any game. So, it's true, it's mysterious: why did I make a pinball game when I had never played on a real one, nor with a game? I don't know. Maybe the idea came to me because it was well suited to the machine of the time. You needed buttons to move the flippers. You needed a very basic monochrome graphical screen, and the Smaky 6 had one. So, it fits well with that machine. […]

SB: When you were creating these games, did you work alone on them? Did everyone have their own little project on the side? Or was there really an exchange when you were creating these games?

DR: So, it was the time when Jean-Daniel Nicoud was developing the hardware for the Smaky. And then, obviously, a Smaky with its hardware does nothing. So, we had to develop the operating system ourselves. If we needed a word processor, we had to write it. A spreadsheet, the same. Basically, we had to do everything. Now, he wasn't interested in that. He was the one inventing the machines. And then, it was other people, including myself, but we were several. And that was done within the framework of Epsitec, which was directed by his wife, who, contrary to what many thought, was not at all a figurehead. She was really the director of Epsitec. Her husband, when it came to manufacturing computers or marketing them, wasn't interested. It was his wife who really managed all that. She was an extremely intelligent woman who knew how to surround herself with all kinds of competent people. And among these competent people, a few rare ones were employees of Epsitec—myself included. But many were not employees at all and did this in their free time. There were teachers, young people, people from all kinds of backgrounds who were involved. And we would meet two or three times a year in their living room. We would all sit in armchairs like here, and that's where we'd exchange ideas, each person showing what they had done because there was no internet, nothing at all, so we didn't know what the others were doing. So, one by one, each person would show what they had done. So those were the moments of sharing, and then a bit of emulation. […] And Epsitec, apart from today, never had offices, so everyone worked from home.

SB: Did Cathi Nicoud have a vision of what needed to be done for the future, or was it really your initiative?

DR: I never really knew what her vision was, but in any case, she knew how to make a compromise between making the best use of everyone's skills—because she knew that [people do] better [on] what interests them than [what] they're forced to do. So, many people, including myself, were fortunate enough to do exactly what we wanted. At the same time, though, she still managed everything because we still had to make products that we could sell, things that would keep the business running, even though salaries were very low. But ... For example, when I started making games on Smaky with Toto [Blupi], it was me who wanted to make those games. And I was lucky that she allowed me to spend a few months a year—while I was also doing other, more "serious" things,—she was okay with me doing that. And, well, in the end, I think she really did the right thing because it was, among other things, these games and other things that made this computer popular and brought it a bit of success.

SB: You had given a small conference where you explained that you used your software programs to make your games, including the drawing one. Did it work out well because you had to work on drawing software, or did you do it for your games as well? In the end, was it a parallel development, or did you think, "this is an opportunity for me to also evolve my games"?

DR: I'm not sure what influenced what, but ... In addition to programming, I've always had a passion for drawing. So creating drawing software was a way to combine both things. But I don't think I made it to then use it for games. I made it because I was genuinely interested in it. Then, when I wrote my first *Toto*—which I think was *Toto à la maison* [Toto at home]—it was natural for me to use

that software and not another. Anyway, I didn't have a PC or a Mac, I was forced to use that software because I didn't have any other computers. […] It was also the time when an absolutely brilliant mechanic, André Guignard, at LAMI [Laboratoire de Micro-Informatique]—well, I think it was the LCD [Laboratoire de Calculatrices Digitales]—was making the very first mice.[11] I'm not going to get into this story because he tells it much better than I do. But it so happened that while I was in Jean-Daniel's lab, there was this mouse, this prototype of a mouse. And there was the Smaky. And nothing was designed to connect them together, so by solving the connectivity issues and hooking up this mouse, et cetera, little by little, we started asking the question: "Well, what do we do? We have a mouse that moves a pointer—a little dot, it's not even an arrow on the screen yet—what can we do with that? Oh yes, we could draw." So, I wrote an initial program where, instead of the dot just moving, it leaves a trace behind that we can save. Then, we thought, "Well, if we want to draw a straight line, it's not practical because it's all irregular," so we enriched the software to allow us to draw straight lines, circles, et cetera […]

SB: I've looked through some documents from Epsitec, and I've seen quite a few Blupi characters appearing. […] In the end, there was a visual identity for Epsitec through your drawings.

DR: Looking back, yes, we realized that there was an identity, but I don't know if it was intentional. I have no idea. […] We were very few [of us] at the time. And I was also the graphic designer for Epsitec. So when we needed to make an ad, which we would print for a newspaper and such, I always tried to sneak in little Blupis. I remember even making ads for our first software product, *Crésus*, which was for management—serious software, accounting, all that—and there were little Blupis in the ads. [*laughs*] […]

PYH: How did the transition from paper drawing to digital drawing go?

DR: These Blupi drawings were done point by point. It was extremely slow. Really. I don't know how I had the patience to do all that, but there's one moment I remember very well—it was when I had patiently drawn three images of Blupi, in three different positions with the legs. I remember walking around my office, thinking about how to place the legs. For me, I had no concept of animation, nothing at all. Should I lean over? How do the arms move? Is it the opposite of the legs, or not? Anyway, I watched myself walking. Then I made my three drawings, and at some point, I wrote the program to make the three drawings follow one another. And that's when I really saw Blupi come to life. I had static drawings, but suddenly, though jerky, I saw it walking. I thought, "Wow!" And that was the start of the motivation to make games where Blupi would do things: walk, chop wood, do all sorts of things. […] I was caught up in it. From that first step, which was quite simple, to making a full game, it's a lot of work, but it's really motivating. […] It's not exciting and creative the whole time. There are phases that are more or less interesting. But one thing that always motivated me a lot was knowing that I was making these games for people to play. Not to sell them and get rich. But it always motivated me to know that a lot of people would play with it. That's a real motivation to finish it and make it good, to hook people, so they want to play and see it through to the end.

SB: And did you play your own games?

DR: So, during development, I played a lot, obviously to test the games. And that's actually a trap, because when you're developing—well, I don't know how it is for other developers, but at least for me—since I played a lot, I became extremely skilled, and I tended to make the games too difficult because for me, there was no problem. So it was hard to find the right balance between a game that's not too easy, which is boring and lacks challenge, and one that's too difficult, where we give up. So when you play your own game, it's really difficult. And I'm not sure how I managed. I know I had my kids test the games a lot, and they gave me a different perspective, a different kind of feedback, showing where they struggled. Then, little by little, as the games became a bit more ambitious, if I may say, the circle of people testing them widened a bit. But it was still mostly family, some

friends. I don't think the games were ever tested by complete strangers we might have recruited from somewhere. [...]

PYH: You explain that, in the end, you didn't go to arcades, you didn't have consoles, and you don't have memories of microcomputers from other sources until the PC. So, outside of your own creations, what is the first video game you played?

DR: Yes, I remember ... I'm not sure if it was the first, but probably it was *Age of Empires* on PC, which I played and which directly inspired me for *Planète Blupi* [Planet Blupi], which is similar.

Figure 10

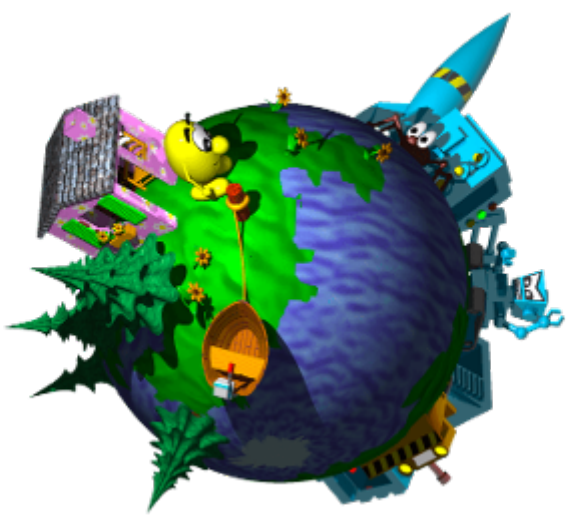


Illustration from *Planet Blupi* (1997), a Windows game by Daniel Roux (Blupi Games, accessed December 3, 2024, https://blupi.org)

PYH: Do you remember if you had a sense of discovery, of thinking, "Wow, there are actually lots of other games, there are people who are interested in this, there are other people creating games somewhere ..."?

DR: Oh yes, that's clear ... I never had a console, as I said. But as soon as I got a PC, I bought a lot of games. In fact, I didn't really enjoy playing them that much, I think, because I always found all those games way too difficult. So I bought a lot of games, I finished none of them, but I was interested in seeing what others were able to do, and maybe that became a motivation. When the first 3D games came out, I also immediately ... Or I don't know if it was before or after, doesn't matter. But I also made 3D games with a rotating camera and everything. So there was some emulation there ...

SB: And did you buy a PC at that time because the Smaky no longer met your needs, or was it to test these other games, or for some entirely different reason?

DR: No. The reason was very—how should I put it—basic. It's that ... no one in the Epsitec team had a PC, or a Mac, or anything at all; we were all using the Smaky. Then one day, I just wanted a PC, like you might want a new toy. So I asked Mrs. Nicoud, "I'd like to have a PC." And then I went to buy it at Interdiscount. That was it. The idea was still to port *Crésus Comptabilité* [Crésus Accounting], which I had written on the Smaky, and make a version for the PC. So, as soon as I got the PC, I rewrote the *Crésus Comptabilité* software for it. I wasn't very well regarded for having a PC because it was a time when there was a kind of "religious war" between Macs and PCs. So, I was a bit of a traitor with my PC. But even here, Mrs. Nicoud had a good sense of things because this *Crésus Comptabilité* (which has long since been taken over and improved by a colleague) is still the best-selling software at Epsitec. But originally, it was this software I wrote on my first PC, so that's pretty funny. [...]

SB: When you switched to PC, did more colleagues become interested in games, or were you still the main developer for Epsitec in this area?

DR: But in fact, among colleagues, we complemented each other quite well. Because what has always fascinated me is the creative aspect of a game. I think even programming wasn't what interested me the most. I was never a great

programmer. I programmed because, well, it was necessary ... And then, other colleagues, like [anonymized], who aren't creative, were more interested in the technical side. So, we complemented each other well when it came to solving technical problems, porting a game from another machine, that interested him, he did that, and it didn't interest me, so everyone benefited.

SB: You started with the Dauphin, so a more hardware-oriented side, because you had to build everything. Then you moved more toward programming, you learned to develop in assembly, and ultimately, it's the creative aspect where you found your true place. So, you had quite a development in your approach to computing ...

DR: Even in accounting software, what interested me the most was imagining an interface that was simple and clear. What we now call UX [user experience]. That's always interested me, even in a management program.

PYH: In some of your games, there are level editors. And there's almost like a helping hand ... You can correct me if I'm wrong, but it feels like I'm seeing a creative person saying to others, "Your turn, look. You can also be creative with this software. It's not just something to receive, you can also do something with it ..."

DR: I wasn't at all innovative. I created level editors just for myself. Afterward, to make the game good, it was a platform game, so you had to jump from block to block and so on. So, it was important to be able to quickly move the blocks to make the game, as I said before, not too easy and not too hard. If I had to go modify the code every time to say the block is no longer there but a little to the right, it wouldn't fit. So for me, it was more practical to create a level editor for myself to make the game enjoyable. And then, why remove it? When distributing the game, it made sense to leave it in. But I had no nobler motivation than that.

PYH: Do you remember testing these level editors, or having them tested? Did people ever think, "Hey, it's fun to make my own levels too"?

DR: Well, I don't remember that. I think ... No. I can't remember when the last game I made was, but then there was a long gap during which ... The direction of Epsitec changed, it was no longer Mrs. Nicoud. And I had a long gap during which I couldn't make any more games because my boss no longer wanted me to make them, much to my disappointment. And then I lost interest in games, so I didn't keep up with them at all. After quite a long period, let's say twenty years, I had a colleague who told me, "You know, look on the internet, there's stuff about Blupi and everything." I was amazed to see videos of people making levels or testing the games. And that's when I actually got some feedback on what certain people were doing with my games. I was really surprised to see that they were still being used a bit and that people were doing things with them. But of course, it was way too late for ... The games were finished a long time ago.

SB: And did you ever receive feedback from players? The more games you made, perhaps you became a bit more well-known, or maybe people would come and talk to you occasionally?

DR: Well, it's now that I get some feedback, actually, when I meet someone who says, "Oh yeah, I played *Blupi* when I was little." "Oh, you're the one who made that?" or things like that. But at the time, no.

SB: So never any feedback on the games? The game would be released, and then you'd move on to something else?

DR: I'm thinking. No, there was no feedback. Because the games were also sold around the world. I'm quite proud of having made a game that was sold in Korea and another one in Israel. When I think about it, I say to myself, "Yeah, that was ..." But for example, I have no feedback, I have no idea how it was received in those countries. […] I have to say that I had extraordinary luck in the sense that I'm not going to complain for fifteen or twenty years about having been able to make games; it's the opposite. I had the extraordinary chance to be able to make

them. And then, well, the world moved on. And gradually, games became huge developments. Back then, the games were small enough for one person to be the programmer, the game designer, the graphic artist, the ... Doing everything. Today, you can still maybe make small casual games like that, but ... by the way, I'm still working on another one…

PYH: What is the current progress of this project? What is the driving force behind it?

DR: It's been almost a year since I retired, and while it's a bit less than before, I still find it interesting to make a game. So, I've started working on a new game. But ... I absolutely don't want to put pressure on myself or say, "I need to finish it," especially not with a deadline. So it will depend on my mood. I have no more constraints, so maybe it will never be finished, maybe it will be finished, I don't know. So I have a little site called ManiaBricks.com, […] where I present a bit of this new game. Also, maybe to see if it sparks any interest or not. Because it's clear that if I see that it interests people, and they say, "When will your game be finished?," maybe that will motivate me to go a bit faster. For now, it's not going fast. […]

PYH: This period without games, the change in management, when they told you "you have to stop making video games." That must have been quite painful to experience, I imagine. How did you handle it?

DR: No, actually, I handled it well because, in management software, I really enjoyed coming up with simple interfaces. I was still lucky at that time, even in management files, to be able to do everything. So it wasn't a colleague who imposed an interface or design, I did everything myself. So there was still a creative aspect, even though I would have preferred it to be a game. Looking back now, I realize I left at the right time because the development of software, even in a small company like Epsitec, involves multiple people who think and impose ideas on each other, and I no longer had my place in that. […]

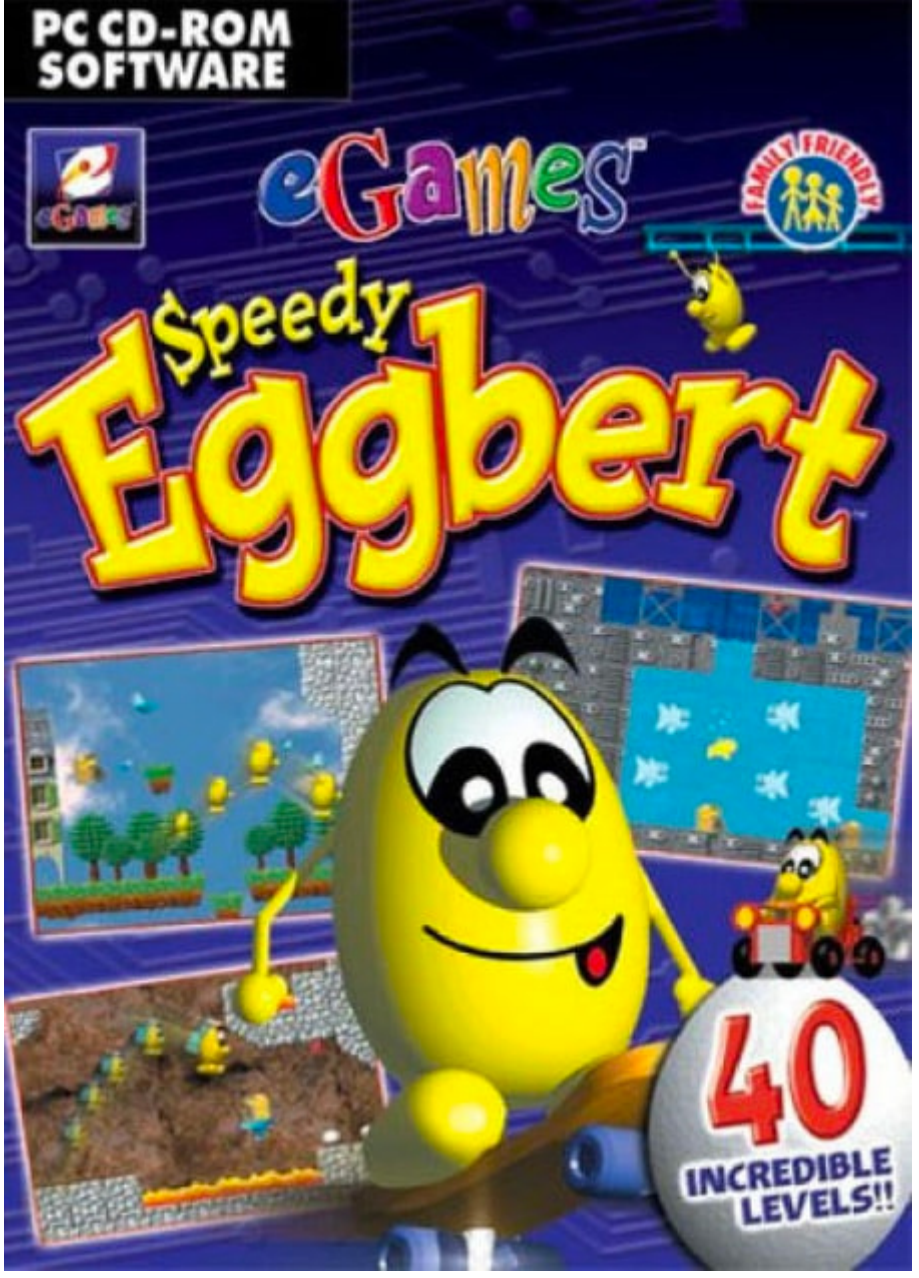
SB: Was it seeing that it was possible on smartphones that gave you the impulse?

DR: Yes, I find ... How can I put it? I find it incredible to think that one can develop a game like that, at home or wherever, and then make it available. And people all over the world can play with it. That motivates me. Not to sell it and make money, but for ... the fact that what has been made is seen and used by so many people.

SB: And the smartphone perhaps offered the possibility to create something accessible in the sense that you could handle all aspects of it, something you couldn't really do anymore. Maybe there was a more accessible side to the software, even with the limitations of the smartphone at that time.

DR: Let's say it immediately sets the scope of the game's ambition, because I can't create a big game, a grand adventure with lots of images, because I ... On my own, I don't have the resources, even if I worked day and night. So it forces me to make a small project, a small game, but with the satisfaction of doing everything from A to Z. That's what I enjoy doing. And with today's technical capabilities, there are so many ... For example, it's more of a technical detail, but when I used to make games at the beginning on Smaky or PC, there were technical challenges to make the animation smooth, to ensure ... And you couldn't have too many things moving on the screen at the same time because the hardware of the machines was limited. Today, if you want to make a game with fifty Blupis all walking at full speed, there's no problem. Any low-end smartphone will be able to handle it at sixty frames per second. So there are no, well, almost no technical challenges left. And now, we can create, invent, and imagine things without limits. […]

Figure 11



Game box for *Speedy Eggbert* (1998), published by eGames. In this version, Blupi was renamed Eggbert. ("Speedy Eggbert PC," Jeuxvideo.com, accessed December 3, 2024, https://www.jeuxvideo.com/jeux/pc/00022441-speedy-eggbert.htm)

SB: Have you felt a change in the regard given to the history of video games? People are asking you about your experience ... Does it change your perspective on your past, your history?

DR: Yes, yes, indeed, as people occasionally come to ask me things now, I realize, belatedly, that it was an exceptional period, and I wasn't aware of it, neither at the time nor until recently. I realize now, with some hindsight, that this period was exceptional, with the arrival of computers and all that. And I realize that I was very lucky to be there at the right time.

Notes

Epsitec informed its users about the Smaky software supplied with the platform through small publications such as *Smaky News*. In particular, it published a number of user creations, including the first video game we have found: *Jeu d'échecs* by F. Klay and C. Clémençon in 1987. [2] Digital Calculator Laboratory (Laboratoire de Calculatrices Digitales, LCD) at EPFL, which was renamed the Microcomputing Laboratory (Laboratoire de Micro-Informatique, LAMI) in 1980. [3] We are currently working on compiling a list of games developed by Daniel Roux (Swiss Games Garden, accessed November 25, 2024, https://swissgames.garden/people/daniel-roux). Apart from the *Blupi* games, which are well documented (M. Schroeter, "Blupi Games," accessed November 25, 2024, https://blupi.org/; and Wikipedia, "Blupi," last modified August 27, 2024, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blupi), Roux also developed other games. The first one we found dates back to 1977, *Testez vos réflexes* on Dauphin. We also identified a pinball game, *Flipper*, created between 1978 and 1980 on Smaky 6, as well as a series of games (*Ping*, *Bong*, *Mur*) on Smaky 100 developed in 1987. The three games are ports of *Speedy Blupi* and *Speedy Blupi II*, and a new one, *Bugs Defense*. We have selected and shared a few key moments from the nearly two-hour interview we conducted. We have translated and refined the extracts for greater clarity. Bracketed ellipses indicate omissions from the complete interview. The full verbatim transcript is in French and can be requested directly from us. This ties in with Melanie Swalwell's analysis: the early microcomputer enthusiasts

built or bought them and then actively researched their potential uses. See Melanie Swalwell, *Homebrew Gaming and the Beginnings of Vernacular Digitality* (MIT Press, 2021). This interview falls within the scope of the sinergia project Confoederatio Ludens: Swiss History of Games, Play and Game Design 1968–2000, funded by the Swiss National Foundation (SNF), See https://chludens.ch and https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/209248. See, notably, the public lecture recorded in 2019 at the University of Lausanne by our colleagues: David Javet and Yannick Rochat, "Blupi explore… L'Histoire du jeu vidéo suisse" [Blupi Explores... The History of Swiss Video Games], with Daniel Roux, Jean-Daniel Nicoud, and Mathieu Schroeter, September 27, 2019, posted by University of Lausanne, YouTube, 1:28:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iea_6DIFCmY. *24 heures* is a Vaud daily newspaper. For a portrait of Daniel Roux, see Julie Collet, "Portrait de Daniel Roux: Le papa de Blupi amuse plusieurs générations," *24 heures*, September 21, 2023, https://www.24heures.ch/portrait-de-daniel-roux-le-papa-de-blupi-amuse-plusieurs-generations-601231142870. At that time, we noticed that this type of reflex game was a common exercise in analog electronics tinkering. These projects were then adapted with the arrival of digital electronics. From 1974, inspired by the mouse invented by the American Douglas Englebart in 1967, Jean-Daniel Nicoud and his colleagues André Guignard and René Sommer worked on several mouse projects. In 1979, they created the first hemispheric mouse, named Souris-4. Initially sold by Depraz, the mouse was later developed by Logitech, where René Sommer continued his career.

Footnotes

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