

## Ramping up Research as Writers and Readers

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The third issue of *Loading...* demonstrates the strong promise of an emergent, trans-disciplinary field that is drawing on disciplinary work from philosophy, psychology, education, film studies, cultural studies, literary studies, drama, and ethnography, among others. The result is a collection of papers that challenges readers to think, read, play, theorize and, most significantly, research and study games differently as the perspectives we bring individually to our work evolve through generative exposure to one another's ideas and frameworks. This has been the larger purpose of *Loading...* and remains the primary indicator of its utility for the development the Canadian game studies community.

As this field stakes out its territory, what becomes increasingly important is the need to more rigorously specify, demarcate and refine not only the terms and definitions that we use to construct and re-construct boundaries, but also to pay close attention to the methodologies we use to approach the work we are doing. Not unlike the upright, "go getting" attitude of Governor Sarah Palin as she ran for Vice-president, many of us have approached research in the field from a maverick, "just give me the tools, any will do" (or in Palin's case, the gun) perspective. This has led, in a few too many cases, to methodological approaches being a kind of after thought, at worst, and at best approached with a kind of naïve positivism with little or no consideration for the careful work that has been done in the past to both set out methods and approaches, and as well, reflexively and critically to challenge them. How often is it the case that someone studies their *own* gameplay but does not, and has not situated that within a methodological framework that both *supports and shows the limitations* of that kind of work? How many of those accounts are explicitly and self-critically situated as auto-ethnographies or phenomenological approaches, or even as autobiographical accounts of play? What we think the third issue of *Loading...* is beginning to do is to more formally acknowledge and set out those more reflexive approaches, to take time and effort to specify terms and methods, and to challenge preconceived notions and values around issues like violence and cultural references in games. While each of the papers in this issue takes a unique approach to its particular question, problem or issue, collectively they demonstrate the breadth and depth this field is increasingly better able to sound.

A few of the papers in this edition warrant particular attention for the groundbreaking work they are attempting to accomplish. Nick Taylor's "Periscopic Play: Re-Positioning 'the field' in MMO Studies" is a detailed examination of the research methodologies employed by some of the more prominent researcher's working on MMOs. He argues that all too often this work has ignored or simply not taken up the critiques that have been brought to bear on its methodological approaches, that there seems to be a cavalier attitude towards methods generally, and that more careful attention to methods might well shift the kind of work currently being done in the field. Also pushing boundaries through critique of current and past work, Nis Bojin's paper "Play and the Private" argues using Wittgenstein that definitions of play *do* matter, carefully elucidating the ways definitional boundaries become permeable and malleable, and how they shape our understandings both intentionally and unwittingly. His work problematizes past general accounts of the tension between "grinding" and "pure play", and offers an alternative understanding of those playful relations through a more thorough explication of what play can mean. A third paper, "Language Game Players: Articulating the Pleasures of Violent Game Texts" by Gareth Schott twists the common argument on violence and video games back to a player's perspective.

Methodologically, this is a radically re-orienting shift. Based on a two-year study of young people playing games, he argues against the pervasive assumption that what players experience in violent video games is indeed “violence,” suggesting that instead they have extremely complex relations to their in-game actions that do not necessarily map on to psychological or even social accounts of violence. In yet another way of ‘reversing the gaze’, “Assassin’s Creed: A Multicultural Read” invites readers into a very different kind of game review, one that is explicitly situated in the cultural and social backgrounds of the players, and which frame that standpoint finds and makes connections between the game world and other cultural scripts and texts in order to make richer and more complex sense of gameplay experience. The review is much less like a game review which focuses on actions, playability, rule sets, artificial intelligence, and so on, all generically construed, and much more like an attempt to make sense of a player experience far more heteroglossic than homogeneous (much like work in literary studies has long ago realized).

The other papers in this volume are no less compelling: they range across the topics of taboos, the subjunctive, virtual identities, new terminologies, alternative rule systems for play and solidifying player perceptions of play.

In the end, like a cheque drawn on a bank, (to borrow from Ezra Pound), the real value of the scholarship produced by any intellectual community depends on what is there to meet it. Readers have as great a role in this venture as do writers. So if we hope to grow our intellectual community, we must ask of ourselves as readers that we look explicitly for those qualities we here signal an aspiration to find in the present collection of texts: a careful, creative, and self-critical attention to concepts and methods, and a persistent determination to learn from one another and to enrich and enlarge our collective understandings of what games research and scholarship is, and can yet become.

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