

Gaming the Edition: Modelling Scholarly Editions through Videogame Frameworks

Jon Saklofske (Acadia University), Nina Belojevic (University of Victoria), Alex Christie (University of Victoria), Sonja Sapach (University of Alberta), John Simpson (Compute Canada), and the INKE research team

The need for interaction within dynamic discourse fields is foreshadowed by Steven Jones when he claims videogames "represent sophisticated ideas of what it means to enable on a digital platform the dynamic, networked, collaborative construction of the social text," much in the tradition of social-text theory ("Second Life" 268-70). Drawing on the parallels between textual studies and game studies, Jones uses *Spore* as an example where players perform the roles of content editors. Extending such a model to a hypothetical textual editing environment, he argues that players and textual analysts could engage through "complex, collaborative modeling" in a space where the text is never fixed, but remains "open, shared, and infinitely alterable" ("Performing the Social Text" 289). We see a player's editing practices as powerful and necessary activities, and all videogames necessarily expose us to that revision and versioning process, no matter how restricted their parameters are.

Games are thus provocative objects and spaces through which we can better understand this post-processing activity in two significant ways. First, many games teach people to become more proficient players by encouraging and rewarding specific trajectories that accord with the overarching motivations of the game designers as well as the physical specifications of gaming systems. Second, the social structures that are generated and supported in multiplayer games, particularly massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), allow this learning process to be redefined and reinforced by a community of players within a persistent game environment.

With these dynamics between editing and playing in mind, how might a multi-contributor scholarly editing game function? Or put differently, how might we game the scholarly edition? For instance, what benefits might result from designing digital editioning environments that help people "level up," learn, and negotiate stages of editorial expertise? Beyond the learning potential offered by gaming techniques, what interventions could be made in traditional editorial processes? Rather than simply mapping existing editorial conventions onto a screen, how might the very workflows and roles of scholarly editing be transformed through gaming, especially social gaming? Finally, how might the processes and products of scholarly editing change within and alongside the materiality of new platforms, particularly networked environments that afford collective intelligence, collaborative authoring, algorithmic interpretation, and unique machine operations?

We ask these questions in full awareness of the criticisms directed at gamification, particularly Ian Bogost's claim that "gamification is bullshit. . . . More specifically, gamification is marketing bullshit, invented by consultants as a means to capture the wild, coveted beast that is videogames and to domesticate it for use in the grey, hopeless wasteland of big business, where bullshit already reigns anyway" ("Gamification" n. pag.). Bogost's major complaint is that the complexities involved in gaming processes are being exploited by business marketing strategies and turned into simple, repeatable, and proven techniques. In short, the specific, contextual functions that distinguish videogames from other forms of mediation, communication, and narrative are reduced to pure facility and rendered accessible to value production and measurement.^[1] Bogost further points out that "[g]ame developers and players have critiqued gamification on the grounds that it gets games wrong, mistaking incidental properties like points and levels for primary features like

