

## Editorial: Behind the Making

Few theses, proposals and books in game studies start without some statement of the importance of video games as a media format. For instance, that the games industry represents a \$113.3 billion market worldwide (Newzoo, 2015); and that games are played for 8.8 hours a week (UKIE, 2017); on phones, consoles and computers by players of all genders and ages (ESA, 2016). However, despite this emphasis on the industry's size and importance, very little academic attention goes toward what is behind the process of designing games.

Extant work reflects on this 'behind the making' of video games in broadly four ways. First, instructional books may take an in-depth look at how game companies work, and how they make games (O'Donnell, 2014; Ruggill *et al.*, 2016; Zackariasson & Wilson, 2012). Second, political economists of games critically analyze and interrogate the specific market dynamics of game industries (Nieborg, 2015; Balland *et al.*, 2013) – and sometimes its workers' precarity (Banks & Cunningham, 2016; Duffy, 2016). Third, historical books look back at the origins and evolution of the industry (Donovan, 2010; Harris, 2014; Therrien & Picard, 2016). Finally, some authors take more broadly theoretical perspectives on the role and function of cultural industries in society (e.g., de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2009; Hesmondhalgh, 2012); or sometimes more specifically the origins and workings of game industries within their particular cultural-geographical contexts (e.g., Aoyama & Izushi, 2003; Grandadam, *et al.*, 2013; Banks & Cunningham, 2016).

## Being Critical of Industry and Academics

Game developer Katharine Neil, writing about the state of the game industry and its relation to academia mounts a call to arms. "We can demand research and development into design support technology—not for more tools for prototyping and production or metrics, but for tools that support design thinking" (2016). In her work, Neil outlines three problems that require urgent attention:

1. Game design tools focus too heavily on the efficiency of production, rather than the fostering of creativity.
2. The game development scene is kept artificially young for cheap and disposable labour with little to no opportunity for sustainable careers with this unsustainable division of labour sourced to a



'creative precariat' workforce (who are also mostly young, white, male, middle class).

3. There is a severe lack of communication and collaboration between academics and game makers.

For Neil, these have led to a palpable stagnation in game design. Judging by the articles selected for this issue of *Press Start Journal*, young game scholars increasingly seek to ameliorate both the lacking academic reflection on game design; and the lack of communication that Neil diagnoses between academics and game makers. Mehmet Kosa and Murat Yilmaz report the design experience of an educational board game. In doing so, their paper details an iterative design process informed by social sciences methods. From an opposing perspective, Eddie Lohmeyer's Critical Insight paper – a category for shorter, provocative papers that we look forward to including more often – complements the insider perspective of Kosa & Yilmaz. Lohmeyer dissects Lucas Pope's critically acclaimed *Papers, Please* as a 'critical making' of a game that introduces a political ethic through its design, by confronting the player with moral decisions on the cusp of bureaucracy and ideology.

The role of developers extends beyond making the artefact of the game. Indeed, Assunção, Brown & Workman show us that looking 'behind the making' of a video game includes a regard for how brands such as *Pokémon* can illuminate the ways in which designers develop communities of players through tournaments, crowdsourcing and transmedia.

Two of our authors take a comparative perspective on the making of games in relation to the film industry. Olivia Huang's article draws parallels with the film-making process by comparing the interactions of the player with filmic techniques. By contrast, Oliver Longmead explores the difference between film and gaming by theorizing the difficulty of converting generic and aesthetic convention: how is *Bloodborne* designed for players to *experience* the Gothic as opposed to showing or telling it – as film and literature might. This tension between Olivia and Oliver's articles might, we hope, prompt further debate.

We close this issue with a book review by Pieter van den Heede, who provides a very critical examination of Ouellette & Thompson's *The Post-9/11 Video Game: A Critical Examination*. This newly released book provides an interesting argument about the ways in which video games were influenced by the trauma of the attacks on New York City on September 11, 2001. Rather than look at the meaning and makings of the games they seek to explore, van den Heede argues, the book seems to occasionally fall victim to opportunistic analyses instead of being what it promises to be: a document of how game designers and players made meaning out of 9/11 through games.

## Behind the Making

Surely, much needs to be done to address the concerns expressed by Katherine Neil. Nonetheless, it is our hope that this issue of *Press Start*, and the six articles contained within, sheds light on ways to peer behind the making of games. As much as we love to research games and their players, there is simultaneously a world of games development that is largely unseen – full of its own intricacies, interests and industriousness.

We can only conclude with a small reflection on the making of *Press Start*. With the release of this sixth issue we feel confident about being able to carry on the momentum of providing compelling bi-yearly issues containing the best young game scholarship to be found. When 'we' push *Press Start*, this means a combined effort of all our authors, reviewers, editors and the extended community surrounding it on *Facebook* and elsewhere. We have some interesting things lined up for the rest of 2017, and we hope that all our readers and contributors will be ready to share and participate in what *Press Start* was designed to do: to collect productive and provocative work from all disciplines; to help young scholars through the process of publication; and to enable good scholarship in the field of game studies.

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