cial game makers to apply the critical-play design model and use the powerful social technology of games to change the world.

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### Newsgames: Journalism at Play

*Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari, and*
*Bobby Schweizer*
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010.
Contents, images, notes, bibliography, index. 235 pp. $24.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780262014878

Games and game-like dynamics continually increase the range of our digitally mediated experience. They make significant demands on our understanding of the wide-ranging, various subjects they affect, including those of work, entertainment media, and journalism. Authors Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer bring a powerful perspective on games and what they can do to the last of these. They provide a provocative framework for how we should think of (and design) games for a field whose challenges in a networked age have been well publicized.

The authors display a knowledge of the relationship between games and the news, one that depends as much on their own experiences with news organizations and the various roles games have played in the news. To their credit, they take a look at both significant news games produced by talented individuals independently of any sponsoring news institution and those commissioned by outlets like the *New York Times* and others. The selection and descriptions of these news games make rewarding reading—one gets an education from the book that includes a real sense of the changing landscape where these two cultural forms meet.

The authors succeed most at creating a scheme for categorizing and thinking about different kinds of games. In their view, we can usefully think of the games deployed in the contexts of news as falling into seven types, each of which gets its own chapter. Current-events games include those that express opinions—whether in a refined editorial style or in cruder "tabloid" form—and those that aim to report the daily news. Documentary news games look beyond current, day-to-day ephemeral events to engage more broadly historical and cultural contexts, which often require greater complexity and involvement to accomplish their ends, ends similar to those of documentaries in other media.

Infographic games build on the long history of infographics in newspapers to engage the audience through increasing interactivity, providing a context for playing with a complex system, and—especially with game objectives—prompting certain kinds of player performance. In a similar fashion, puzzle news games draw on the long history of puzzles (particularly crosswords) in newspapers as "literate" pastimes related to the news. Digital news games provide an opportunity to broaden the encounters between  the puzzle and the news.

The authors are also interested in how games are emerging around the news, beyond the "doing" of traditional news tasks. Literacy news games seek to educate journalists and the public about

journalism itself, while community news games attempt to bring together communities and cultivate their solidarity. Finally, platform news games are entire systems for the creation of other news games, including already existing complex game environments (like *Grand Theft Auto*) that might be used for news game purposes.

The work here is ambitious, charting a way to think about the encounter between the news and games, and it will no doubt find traction among scholars, game makers, and possibly editors seeking to orient themselves, ask questions, and make a living in this area. From the broader perspective of scholarship on games and play, however, what strikes me about the book are its largely implicit premises. When we look closely at *Newsgames*—and also at Bogost's prior work—we see that the book's topic is a natural one for his rather peculiar approach to games and play.

Put simply, for Bogost (and his collaborators in this work) games are always *about* something. As they state here (speaking about games generally): "Good games *depict* system dynamics rather than narrating specific accounts" (p. 2, emphasis added; see also pp. 126, 137), and for every game they mention, there is always a system depicted in this way. This book, then, treats our experience of games as an experience *of* a representation (*of* something else), rather than treating our experience of games, even if only sometimes, as an experience *in* itself. Given the fascination with representation that still has a hold over some parts of the

academy, these assumptions can fly under the radar, as it were. They require some teasing out, so I will take one very brief illustrative example. When the authors mention *Madden Football* (p. 137) it is striking because *Madden Football* is, for them, "a procedural model of the sport of American football." Therefore, it is, from their point of view, a good example of a game. But the reader may ask: What about American football itself? What about the games and sports people play that do not seem necessarily "about" anything? What about those that seem only partially so?

The approach to games that underwrites this book sees all games as reducible to representation. While this notion conveniently fits the aims of journalism, it adds very little to our understanding of the experience of games and to the disposition of play they can cultivate in a broader sense. The compelling quality of well-designed games—their ability to command our attention—characterizes all good games, not just distinctly representational ones. We cannot explain this quality by representation alone, which many other works on games make. The authors have produced a book that within its purview provides a framework undoubtedly useful for understanding some aspects of some games, but scholars of play and games must look elsewhere when asking the larger questions of how to account for the prominence of games today.

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