

women have always been gamers—and the ways women assert this identity—feel like the heart of the text and the key for the eventual next steps Cote will lay out in her conclusion. Beyond this deeper interpretative work, Cote also seems to have stronger footing here, falling less into her tendency in the first half of the book to undercut her statements with “probably” and “potentially.” One sticking point: it is not always clear to me where Cote is focusing on issues women have as women gamers versus issues women have as gamers—and what it means for these to coexist as distinct entities. Her final chapter offers a poignant, refreshing perspective on how women gamers’ identities shift over time, although her framing of the entire chapter around GamerGate seems slightly awkward and forced.

Overall, though the book struggles to weave all the pieces together, Cote has presented an efficient and powerful history of what it means to be a female gamer and how all present in the gaming realm can pave a way forward. There do seem odd gaps in the discussion. For instance, Cote twice brings up the “second shift” in relation to women’s household work, but she never addresses in detail the skewed labor women take on while establishing and protecting their gamer identities. Her exploration of prior research in the first half of the book could be greatly condensed, which would allow more room for interpretation in the vital second half of the text. Regardless of these quibbles, Cote’s voice emerges strong. Because the work leans often into compilation and reflection, it is a solid resource for anyone who has not previously delved into gaming sexism. For anyone already well versed, this book does

not seat itself as a particularly revelatory text, but its collection of proof and detail of the feminine gamer identity makes it a worthy read for those who want to further gaming equity in the near future.

---

—Christina Xan, *University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC*

### **Performativity in Art, Literature, and Videogames**

*Darshana Jayemanne*

London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. Introduction, list of figures, list of tables, bibliography, and index. 331 pp. \$159, paper. ISBN 9783319853963

Darshana Jayemanne’s *Performativity in Art, Literature, and Videogames* has seemingly modest aims: to explain how games create experiences. However, as Jayemanne demonstrates, this is anything but simple. Neither games nor play are homogenous. There is variability in both players and games that makes typological approaches to video games unwieldy. Additionally, games scholarship has generally taken either a player-centered or a formalist approach—in other words, a focus on the individualistic act of play or the formal construction of games as a medium. As Jayemanne notes, the tendency to overprivilege either leads to overstating each’s importance. This is the gordian knot that Jayemanne cuts through by developing the concept of “performative multiplicities” as well as a corresponding methodology, which he describes as a “comparative approach to the analysis of videogame performances . . . that is capable of accounting

for the many ways that particular performances arise from [gaming's] multiplicity" (p. 2). This approach promises to account for the heterogeneity of games and play while also accounting for all the actors involved in videogame play.

In the first chapter, "Videogames as Performances," Jayemanne forefronts video game's ability to produce performances by characterizing them "as an archive that is accessed, modified, and manipulated in a very particular way: playful performance" (p. 2). This description emphasizes the mutual production of performances through interactions between player and game. But a complication emerges in defining "performance." What exactly is the unit of analysis? Contrasting with Ian Bogost's concept of "unit operations," from *Unit Operations*, which separates video games into discrete units of analysis based on a game's programming, Jayemanne argues that "videogames themselves are multiplicities, and each videogame performance is a kind of count-as-one . . . performances arise out of multiplicity as a dynamic internal to and constitutive of the game" (p. 19). Jayemanne draws attention to the fact that units of analysis are never discrete nor obvious. They are caught up in what Jayemanne dubs "the muddle" of play, indicating "a state in which we do not yet know what constitutes a performance" (p. 15). Drawing from J. L. Austin's theorization in *How to Do Things With Words* of speech acts as performative actions and from Angela Ndalani's work on framing devices in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, chapter 2, "How to do Things with Images," begins to break the multiplicities of play into units

demarcated by frames. The early sections of the book are, in my estimation, the most lucid and generalizable. Jayemanne elucidates the fine details and complications that arise when studying games that are often left unstated, and by bringing them to light (and providing language) future analysis can be sharpened.

At the same time, this project is nothing if not ambitious, and this ambition may overextend its scope by placing video games into an overly broad discussion of art and literature. Chapter 3, "What is *Rhyparography*? The Ambiguity of the Framing Device," for example, launches into an analysis of Van Haecht's painting "The Cabinet of Cornelis van der Geest" to show how frames serve as a means to navigate complex media and also to draw attention to outside spaces. Chapter 4, "Fanciful Microscopy"—Framing Devices and Uncertainty in Pynchon's *the Crying of Lot 49*," continues the analysis of framing devices with an extended treatment of *The Crying of Lot 49* that introduces uncertainty into the concept of the frame. Later, chapter 8 "Physical Wit: Games and the 'Tactile Unconscious'" is dedicated to a reading of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* that demonstrates how Walter Benjamin's writings on distraction can be understood to produce felicitous embodied engagements with video games. Popular and academic discourses surrounding video games tend to overemphasize what is unique to the form, ignoring prior theorization as well as the ways video games remediate existing media forms. Jayemanne's forays into art and literature serve as a corrective to this tendency. At the same time, these chapters-long investigations may have been better served by

more directly connecting to video games because it can be unclear how the language and concepts applied to art and literature function in regard to video games.

Still, over the course of the book, Jayemanne expands on the concept of the frame as a device that is produced through both player engagement and game design (particularly in the analysis of *Half-Life* in chapter 5 “Anterior Motives—From Subjective Shot to *Portal*’s Figure of Reversal”). Frames are not a formal quality of a game. Instead, they arise out of the muddle of player and game world. The insistence on video games as “a muddle” from which play arises is one of the most important aspects of *Performativity in Art, Literature, and Videogames*. Player’s orientation toward games become central to how the designed elements of games produce play. The importance is most stark in chapter 6, “Performative Multiplicities” in which the author develops a “ludology for losers,” which extends an analysis of play practices that can be subsumed under an “aesthetics of infelicity.” Specifically, discussions of glitches and the “fog of war” found in real-time strategy games are offered to show how poor play, broken games, and incomplete information are central to

video game performances. Gaming culture, broadly, is obsessed with expert play; however, if we are to account for the multiplicities of video game performances then developing language to engage with the ways players and games fail is imperative.

The remaining sections address issues of embodiment that arise from gaming’s serial frames and the unstable temporality that video game’s shifting frames produce. Each of these sections builds off the prior work in interesting ways culminating in an extended analysis of the game *Life Is Strange* that serves as a demonstration of the methods Jayemanne unfolds over the course of the book. Finally, Jayemanne ends with a short, yet extremely useful, conclusion that clearly explains his methodology in a bullet-pointed list, one which helps cut through the—at times—jargon-laden prose that comprises much of the book. This section is clearly written and illuminates the core threads. It also serves as a guide for analyzing video game performances, which is sure to be useful for anyone who takes seriously the complicated phenomena of videogame play.

---

—Madison Schmalzer, *Ringling College of Art and Design, Sarasota, FL*